

1 Corinthians 7, 1-16: Husband And Wife Marital Relationship Along With Conjugal Union Responsibilities According to the Apostle Paul

Greek Text (K. Aland, 28 th ed.)	Transliteration	Literal Translation	Fluent English
1 Περὶ δὲ ὧν ἐγράψατε, καλὸν ἀνθρώπῳ γυναικὸς μὴ ἅπτεσθαι·	1 Peri de hōn egrapsate, kalon anthrōpō gynaikos mē haptesthai•	1 Then, concerning [the things] about which you wrote: [it is] good for a man a woman not to touch.	1 Now concerning the matters about which you wrote: ‘It is well for a man not to touch a woman.’
2 διὰ δὲ τὰς πορνείας ἕκαστος τὴν ἑαυτοῦ γυναῖκα ἐχέτω καὶ ἐκάστη τὸν ἴδιον ἄνδρα ἐχέτω.	2 dia de tas porneias hekastos tēn heautou gynaika echetō kai hekastē ton idion andra echetō.	2 But, because of [sexual] immorality, each [man] the of himself woman let have and to each [woman] the own husband let have.	2 But because of cases of sexual immorality, each man should have his own wife and each woman her own husband.
3 τῇ γυναικί ὁ ἀνὴρ τὴν ὀφειλὴν ἀποδιδότω, ὁμοίως δὲ καὶ ἡ γυνὴ τῷ ἀνδρί.	3 tē gynaiki ho anēr tēn ophelēn apodidotō, homoiōs de kai hē gynē tō andri.	3 To the woman the husband the duty let pay back, then likewise also the woman to the husband.	3 The husband should give to his wife her conjugal rights, and likewise the wife to her husband.
4 ἡ γυνὴ τοῦ ἰδίου σώματος οὐκ ἐξουσιάζει ἀλλ’ ὁ ἀνὴρ, ὁμοίως δὲ καὶ ὁ ἀνὴρ τοῦ ἰδίου σώματος οὐκ ἐξουσιάζει ἀλλ’ ἡ γυνή.	4 hē gynē tou idiou sōmatos ouk exousiazēi all’ ho anēr, homoiōs de kai ho anēr tou idiou sōmatos ouk exousiazēi all’ hē gynē.	4 The woman [over] the own body does not have authority, but the husband, then, likewise also the husband [over] the own body does not have authority, but the woman.	4 For the wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does; likewise the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does.
5 μὴ ἀποστερεῖτε ἀλλήλους, εἰ μὴτι ἂν ἐκ συμφώνου πρὸς καιρὸν, ἵνα σχολάσητε τῇ προσευχῇ καὶ πάλιν ἐπὶ τὸ αὐτὸ ἦτε, ἵνα μὴ πειράζη ὑμᾶς ὁ σατανᾶς διὰ τὴν ἀκρασίαν ὑμῶν.	5 mē apostereite allēλους, ei mēti an ek symphōnou pros kairon, hina scholasēte tē proseuchē kai palin epi to auto ēte, hina mē peirazē hymas ho satanas dia tēn akrasian hymōn.	5 Do not deprive one another, if not perchance out of harmonious [decision] for a time, in order that you might be free to prayer and again over the same [place] you will be, so that may not test you the Satan through the lack of self-control of you.	5 Do not deprive one another except perhaps by agreement for a set time, to devote yourselves to prayer, and then come together again, so that Satan may not tempt you because of your lack of self-control.
6 τοῦτο δὲ λέγω κατὰ συγγνώμην οὐ κατ’ ἐπιταγήν.	6 touto de legō kata syngnōmēn ou kat’ epitagēn.	6 But this I say according to a concession, not according to an order.	6 This I say by way of concession, not of command.
7 θέλω δὲ πάντας ἀνθρώπους εἶναι ὡς καὶ ἑμαυτόν· ἀλλ’ ἕκαστος ἴδιον ἔχει χάρισμα ἐκ θεοῦ, ὁ μὲν οὕτως, ὁ δὲ οὕτως.	7 thelō de pantas anthrōpous einai hōs kai emauton• all’ hekastos idion echei charisma ek theou, ho men houtōs, ho de houtōs.	7 Then, I want all men to be like even myself. But each [man] own has gift from God, one indeed [has gift] this way, but one [has gift] this way.	7 I wish that all were as I myself am. But each has a particular gift from God, one having one kind and another a different kind.
8 λέγω δὲ τοῖς ἀγάμοις καὶ ταῖς χήραις, καλὸν αὐτοῖς ἐὰν μείνωσιν ὡς καγώ·	8 Legō de tois agamois kai tais chērais, kalon autois ean meinōsin hōs kagō•	8 Then, I say to the unmarried and to the widows, [it is] good if they should remain like myself also.	8 To the unmarried and the widows I say that it is well for them to remain unmarried as I am.

9 εἰ δὲ οὐκ ἐγκρατεύονται, γαμησάτωσαν, κρείττον γάρ ἐστιν γαμῆσαι ἢ πυροῦσθαι.	9 ei de ouk enkrateuontai, gamēsatoṣan, kreitton gar estin gamēσαι ē pyrousthai.	9 But if they do not have self-control, let them marry, for better it is to marry than to burn [with passion].	9 But if they are not practising self-control, they should marry. For it is better to marry than to be aflame with passion.
10 Τοῖς δὲ γεγαμηκόσιν παραγγέλλω, οὐκ ἐγὼ ἀλλ’ ὁ κύριος, γυναῖκα ἀπὸ ἀνδρός μὴ χωρισθῆναι,	10 Tois de gegamēkosin parangellō, ouk egō all’ ho kyrios, gynaika apo andros mē chōrīsthēnai,	10 Then, to those having been married, I order, not me, but the Lord, a woman from a man not to be separated.	10 To the married I give this command—not I but the Lord—that the wife should not separate from her husband
11 – ἐὰν δὲ καὶ χωρισθῆ, μενέτω ἄγαμος ἢ τῷ ἀνδρὶ καταλλαγῆτω,– καὶ ἄνδρα γυναῖκα μὴ ἀφιέναι.	11 – ean de kai chōrīsthē, menetō agamos ē tō andri katallagētō,– kai andra gynaika mē aphienai.	11 - But if indeed she might be separated, let her stay unmarried or to the husband let her be reconciled, - and a husband a woman not to leave.	11 (but if she does separate, let her remain unmarried or else be reconciled to her husband), and that the husband should not divorce his wife.
12 Τοῖς δὲ λοιποῖς λέγω ἐγὼ οὐχ ὁ κύριος· εἴ τις ἀδελφὸς γυναῖκα ἔχει ἄπιστον καὶ αὕτη συνευδοκεῖ οἰκεῖν μετ’ αὐτοῦ, μὴ ἀφιέτω αὐτήν·	12 Tois de loipois legō egō ouch ho kyrios• ei tis adelphos gynaika echei apiston kai hautē syneudokei oikein met’ autou, mē aphietō autēn•	12 Then, to the rest I say, I, not the Lord, if certain brother a woman he has faithless and her she approves to dwell with him, do not leave her.	12 To the rest I say—I and not the Lord—that if any believer[a] has a wife who is an unbeliever, and she consents to live with him, he should not divorce her.
13 καὶ γυνὴ εἴ τις ἔχει ἄνδρα ἄπιστον καὶ οὗτος συνευδοκεῖ οἰκεῖν μετ’ αὐτῆς, μὴ ἀφιέτω τὸν ἄνδρα.	13 kai gynē ei tis echei andra apiston kai houtos syneudokei oikein met’ autēs, mē aphietō ton andra.	13 And a woman if certain man has and this one approves to dwell with her, do not leave the husband.	13 And if any woman has a husband who is an unbeliever, and he consents to live with her, she should not divorce him.
14 ἡγίασται γὰρ ὁ ἀνὴρ ὁ ἄπιστος ἐν τῇ γυναικὶ καὶ ἡγίασται ἡ γυνὴ ἡ ἄπιστος ἐν τῷ ἀδελφῷ· ἐπεὶ ἄρα τὰ τέκνα ὑμῶν ἀκάθαρτά ἐστιν, νῦν δὲ ἁγία ἐστιν.	14 hēgiastai gar ho anēr ho apistos en tē gynaiki kai hēgiastai hē gynē hē apistos en tō adelphō• epei ara ta tekna hymōn akatharta estin, nyn de hagia estin.	14 For has been sanctified the husband the faithless in the woman and has been sanctified the woman the faithless in the brother. Since then the children of you unclean are, but now holy they are.	14 For the unbelieving husband is made holy through his wife, and the unbelieving wife is made holy through her husband. Otherwise, your children would be unclean, but as it is, they are holy.
15 εἰ δὲ ὁ ἄπιστος χωρίζεται, χωριζέσθω· οὐ δεδούλωται ὁ ἀδελφὸς ἢ ἡ ἀδελφὴ ἐν τοῖς τοιούτοις· ἐν δὲ εἰρήνῃ κέκληκεν ὑμᾶς ὁ θεός.	15 ei de ho apistos chōrizetai, chōrizesthō• ou dedoulōtai ho adelphos ē hē adelphē en tois toioutois• en de eirēnē keklēken hymas ho theos.	15 But if the faithless separates, let him separate. Not have been enslaved the brother or sister in the such [things]. But in peace you have called you the God.	15 But if the unbelieving partner separates, let it be so; in such a case the brother or sister is not bound. It is to peace that God has called you.
16 τί γὰρ οἶδας, γυναῖκα, εἰ τὸν ἄνδρα σώσεις; ἢ τί οἶδας, ἄνερ, εἰ τὴν γυναῖκα σώσεις;	16 ti gar oidas, gynai, ei ton andra sōseis; ē ti oidas, aner, ei tēn gynaika sōseis;	16 For how you know, woman, if the husband you will save? Or how you know, husband, if the woman you will save?	16 Wife, for all you know, you might save your husband. Husband, for all you know, you might save your wife.

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André Gilbert, February 2017

I. Introduction

A. The Most Recent Teaching of the Church on Marital Relationship

On March 19, 2016, Pope Francis published his apostolic Exhortation *Amoris Laetitia* (The Joy of Love)¹. This Exhortation brought together results of two Synods on the family convoked by Pope Francis in 2014 and 2015. Remarkably, not only does it recognize the complexity and struggles of today's marital relationship², but it also includes a whole section dedicated to "Seeds of the Word and imperfect situations"³. As well, it breaks from a century-old approach that reminds us of the church's doctrine; additionally, it redirects the focus on forming conscience and acknowledges the faithful as being "capable of carrying out their own discernment in complex situations"⁴. Hence, Pastors need to help people not simply to follow rules, but also to practice "discernment"⁵.

This anticipated Exhortation was to address the issue of divorced and remarried Catholics with respect to Communion. Notwithstanding those expecting a clear answer may be disappointed by its lack of clarity, it does nonetheless carry this clear message: It is important that the divorced who have entered a new union should still be considered members of the Church. "They are not excommunicated" and they should not be treated as such, since they remain part of the ecclesial community⁶.

This message, nevertheless, triggers an extra question: How far can they be integrated in the Church's practice? To such a question, the Exhortation replies that "neither the Synod nor this Exhortation could be expected to provide a new set of general rules, canonical in nature and applicable to all cases"⁷. On the one hand, a typical answer for the faithful who need to discern that the "degree of responsibility is not equal in all cases, and so the consequences or effects of a rule need not necessarily always be the same"⁸. On the other hand, the Exhortation opens the door to reception of Communion, called "full participation", for those in "irregular" situation: "Conversation with the priest, in the internal forum, contributes to the formation of a correct judgment on what hinders the possibility of a fuller participation in the life of the Church and on what steps can foster it and make it grow"⁹.

Further to making a step forward toward integrating divorced and remarried Catholics, the Exhortation's major contribution covers the whole space of marital relationship and conjugal union responsibilities. In doing so, it refers several times to the Apostle Paul's teaching through his letters, and more specifically comments Paul's hymn to love (1 Corinthians 13): love is patient; love is kind; love is not jealous or boastful, neither is it arrogant nor rude, etc. (4-7)¹⁰. And this love engages in a process of constant growth, and participates in that infinite charity which is the Holy Spirit, allowing Paul to say: "May the Lord make you increase and abound in love to one another" (1 Th 3:12), and urging his beloved to love all the brothers more (1 Th 4:9-10)¹¹. So sexuality needs to be set in the context of true love. This is why the Exhortation refers to 1 Th 4:4-6 where Paul urges his beloved: to abstain from fornication, to control their own body in holiness and honour, as well as to avoid exploiting a brother or sister in this matter¹²; and finally refers to 1 Cor 7:5 where "Paul taught that sex must involve communication between the spouses: he brings up the possibility of postponing sexual relations for a period, but by agreement"¹³. This means that sexual submission should be clearly rejected, and so the Exhortation needs to explain why Paul tells women to "be subject to your husbands" (Eph 5:22), supplemented by "Be subject to one another" (Eph 5:21), and "husbands should love their wives as their own bodies" (Eph 5:28)¹⁴.

One may hardly discuss the meaning of marriage without including the state of virginity, about which the Exhortation again relies on Paul. In this context, virginity is a form of love, a sign "of the coming of the Kingdom and the need for complete devotion to the cause of the Gospel (cf. 1 Cor 7:32)"¹⁵. This reflects Paul's own choice and recommendation because of his belief in Jesus' imminent return and his desire to focus only on spreading the Gospel: "the appointed time has grown very short" (1 Cor 7:29)¹⁶. That being said, he acknowledges not having received any command from the Lord, and that different callings have their own value: "Each has his or her own special gift from God, one of one kind and one of another" (1 Cor 7:7)¹⁷.

¹ For the full text, see the Vatican Web site on [Amoris Laetitia](#).

² See *Amoris Laetitia*, # 50-57.

³ *Ibid.*, # 76-79.

⁴ *Ibid.*, # 37.

⁵ *Ibid.*, # 304.

⁶ *Ibid.*, # 243.

⁷ *Ibid.*, # 300.

⁸ *Idem.*

⁹ *Idem.* "Not surprisingly, conservative Catholics were in disarray and expressed their concerns, more specifically on chapter 8 accompanying, discerning and integrating weakness". For instance, see [The Catholic World Report](#) pinpointing five serious problems with chapter 8, namely: "the role that mitigated culpability should play in pastoral care, the inconsistent notion of "not judging" others, the role of conscience in acquitting persons in objectively sinful situations, moral absolutes treated as "ideal" rather than binding moral duties on everyone in each situation, the oversight on Trent Council (16th century)".

¹⁰ This covers the whole chapter 4, # 90-119.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, # 134.

¹² *Ibid.*, # 154.

¹³ *Idem.*

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, # 156.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, # 159.

¹⁶ *Idem.*

¹⁷ *Idem.*

Despite being single, Paul wrote a profound theological passage on the marital relationship in Eph 5, where he relates the couple to this “mystery” of that union of Christ and the Church (21-33) and which the Exhortation refers to in terms of the Trinitarian dimension of marriage¹⁸.

The Exhortation concludes that the teaching of Jesus and Paul is set in the context of the ultimate dimension of our human existence, and that:

We urgently need to rediscover the richness of this teaching. By heeding it, married couples will come to see the deeper meaning of their journey through life¹⁹.

The Exhortation tried to answer questions that stem from our modern world where marital relationship faces turbulence. In trying to resolve those issues, it refers back to Paul’s writings for clarification. But, in doing so, it only touches a few sentences of the Apostle, without deepening his mindset. Let’s examine some of his writings deeper to explore how he addresses issues in his own time, and find out whether those discoveries could potentially guide us through our own modern issues.

B. Our Purpose and Method

In Section A of our Introduction, the Exhortation refers to a number of Paul’s letters, namely: 1 Thessalonians (3:12 in #134; 4:6-9-10 in #134 and #154), Philippians (1:23 in #256; 2:4 in #101), 1 Corinthians (4:12 in #24; 7:5.29-32 in #154, #159 and #325; 8:1 in #97; 9:12 in #24; 11:17-34 in #185; 13:4-7 in #90-119), 2 Corinthians (3:2-3 in #322), Ephesians (5:21-33 in #11); notably, 1 Corinthians stands out for its elaboration on marital relationship. More specifically, its chapter 7 thrusts a core of issues brought up by the Corinthian community where our study will focus.

Our purpose is to clarify conjugal union responsibilities in the context of a normal marital relationship and in the context of what is called the “Pauline privilege”²⁰ using Paul’s view, so as to shed light on the true meaning of the conjugal bound. In this way, we hope to design a framework guiding Christian couples.

Our analysis will start by setting the historical and literary context of 1 Cor 7; one cannot grasp the true meaning of a text without understanding the author, addressees and circumstances surrounding the letter; additionally, we will need to understand where 1 Cor 7 fits in the overall 1 Corinthians letter. Furthermore, we will need to determine the nucleus of our analysis, i.e. delimiting the text being studied and establishing the Greek source by means of textual critique. Finally, we will tackle the exegesis of each verse²¹.

II. The Overall Context of 1 Corinthians 7

A. Historical and Literary Context

1. 1 Corinthians in Paul’s Mission

There are two sources we can rely on to find out more about the man named Paul, his own letters and Luke’s Acts of the Apostles. But we need to be aware that Luke’s portrait of both Jesus’ Apostles and Paul has its own agenda that began with his Gospel, where Jesus public ministry was launched in Galilee (Luke 4:14-15) and ended in Jerusalem (Luke 24:33-35), where the church started (Acts 1:12-14) and spread to the entire world (Luke 24:47-49, Acts 1:8). As Luke paints the twelve Apostles in his Gospel, he does likewise with Paul in Acts; hence, we must be cautious about his paintings. Therefore, proper approach ought to be taken: rely first on Paul’s own writings, and then “use Acts to supplement the autobiographical data of the letters”²².

a. A Chronology of Paul’s life

How old was Paul when he wrote his first letter to the Corinthians? Indubitably, we don’t have his birth certificate; yet, a clue is provided by a word from his own pen in the letter to Philemon, i.e. *πρεσβύτης* (v. 9), which means: elderly. According to the Greek tradition (56 years for Hippocrates), and the Jewish tradition (60 years for the *Mishna*, tract *Aboth* 5.21), “any male in his late fifties or early sixties would have been considered an ‘elderly’”²³. Thus, if the letter to Philemon was written in 53 and Paul was about 60 years old, this means he was born in the very tail-end of the pre-Christ’s era, around 6 BC, almost at the same time as Jesus²⁴.

Another milestone is Paul’s conversion. Evidence to establish a date is provided by putting together 2 Cor 11:32-33 where Paul writes about his escape from the hands of Damascus King Aretas in a basket, and Galatians 1:17-18 where he informs the readers that, immediately after his conversion, he went away into Arabia, and afterwards went to Damascus where he lived

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, # 11.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, # 325.

²⁰ For a quick presentation of the “Pauline Privilege” from a Catholic perspective, see Msgr. M. Francis Mannion in [OSV Newsweekly](#).

²¹ The Greek text will be based on Kurt Aland’s *Novum Testamentum Graece*, 28th ed., and the English translation on the New Revised Standard Version, unless we disagree on the translation of some words.

²² J. Knox, *Chapters in a Life of Paul*. New York/ Nashville: Abingdon-Cokesbury, 1950, p. 50, referred to by J. Murphy-O’Connor, *Paul. A Critical Life*. Oxford-New York: Oxford University Press, 1996, p. v (Kindle edition). Note: all reference to this work will be from the Kindle edition.

²³ J. Murphy-O’Connor, *op. cit.*, p. 4. For the whole of Paul’s chronology, we will rely on his research.

²⁴ *Iidem*. The date of Paul’s letters will be discussed later on.

for 3 years before heading to Jerusalem. Aretas refers to the Nabatean King Aretas IV who reigned from 9 BC to 39 AD. It must be known that Arabia refers to the Nabatean region, and that Damascus underwent into Nabatean control when Gaius (Caligula) led the Roman Empire and reinstated a number of client kings in 37 AD, including Aretas IV who supported his father Germanicus. Taking year 37 as our flagpole for Paul's escape, we can work backward and establish year 34 for his short stint in Arabia. As Paul's conversion seems to precede immediately his time in Arabia, it should be assigned to 33 AD, when he was in his late thirties²⁵. Going forward on 33 AD, we could date Paul's second visit to Jerusalem in 51, fourteen years later (see Ga 2:1).

Now, when did Paul come to Corinth and founded the Christian community? Even if Luke's Acts is not always accurate and should be used as supplementary data, we should pay attention to Acts 18:12 when Paul living in Corinth is brought before the tribunal of Gallio, proconsul of Achaia. On Gallio, nine fragments of an inscription were discovered over the years in Delphi and officially published in 1970. These fragments refer to a letter from Claudius where Gallio is mentioned and was probably written in April or May 52 AD²⁶. Thus, the proconsul's name could be mentioned even after his departure from office. In fact, Gallio, the brother of Seneca, probably arrived in July of 51 in Achaia, but seemed to have stayed only four months, as he suffered a "malady of the place" according to Seneca. So, the encounter between Paul and Gallio would have taken place between July and September 51, a timeframe when Gallio could still sail back to Rome before winter. In that season of the year, we can assume that Paul took as well the opportunity of the favourable sailing timespan to go back to Jerusalem as hinted by Acts 18:22 (*he went up and greeted the Church*). This date of fall 51 for Paul's second visit to Jerusalem matches well with what we just said above while commenting Ga 2:1. And Luke says that Paul lived 18 months in Corinth (Acts 18:11), which is plausible once considering time to make conversion, meaning that Paul would have reached Corinth in April 50²⁷.

The next milestone in Paul's chronology may well come from two references in Acts: Luke tells us that Paul was sent to the governor Antonius Felix in Caesarea (Acts 23:24), and two years later, Felix was replaced by Porcius Festus (Acts 25:1). Using Josephus (*Antiquities of the Jews*, 20, 137-138) data, we can say that Felix took office in year 52. As to Felix replacement by Festus, we need to take into account the fact that Felix was deposed by Nero as well as a reference from Eusebius of Caesarea in order to date it back to year 59 or 60²⁸.

Up to now, we know Paul's conversion took place in year 33 (3 years after Jesus death in 30²⁹), went to Arabia in 34, then is found in Damascus where he lived for 3 years before escaping in 37 and heading to Jerusalem. In April 50 he was in Corinth where he established the Christian community, and finally went to Jerusalem in the fall of 51 for his second visit.

But what did happen to Paul between year 37 and 50? Substantiation instances are provided by his first letter to Thessalonians mentioning a previous visit to Philippi where he had been badly treated (2:2); that would have been followed by his stay in Athens (3:1), and finally an unnamed location where his 1 Corinthians letter was written (3:6). The tone of his letter suggests that the church at Thessalonica had then been recently established. In his letter to Philippians, Paul pinpoints the fact that when he left Macedonia (where Thessalonica is located), it was the only church that volunteered helping him (4:15). From this letter, we can infer two things: the letter was probably written in Achaia where he could have plausibly received some money, and prior to establishing the church in Philippi, Paul had founded other communities that could have assisted him financially, however might not have. The most logical geographical direction being from east to west, we can formulate the hypothesis that "on one and the same voyage, Paul founded, in the following order, the churches of Galatia, Philippi, Thessalonica, and Corinth, having travelled through Athens, where he accomplished nothing"³⁰.

But when exactly did this take place? Let's moonwalk from year 50 when Paul was in Corinth. Granted that travellers strived to avoid winter, we can assume that Paul spent at least the winter of 49-50 in Macedonia, and up to two winters, in order to explain the level of maturity gained by those communities he had founded. This brings us to the summer of 48, probably in Galatia. In his letter to Galatians, Paul mentions a rather serious illness that brought him to stay in the community (4:13-14). So, given these facts: that Paul would have arrived in Galatia before the first snowfall on the Anatolia plateau, that he founded a number of communities, 'the churches of Galatia' (Gal 1:2), and that he did need time for health recovery, "we must postulate that he spent two winters in Galatia, namely AD 46-48". All of this means that Paul plausibly left Antioch in April 46, walking about one thousand kilometers to reach Galatia, an average of 25 kilometers each day³¹.

In the fall of 51, when Paul paid his second visit to Jerusalem, we know from both Acts (15) and (Gal 2:1-10) that he attended what is called the "Jerusalem Conference", after which he went back to Antioch (Gal 2:11). Then how long did he stay there? With an educated guess: not long due to his temperament and James' interference (Gal 2:11-14). In fact, we have several indications that he started travelling again: in 1 Cor 16:8, Paul expresses his desire to stay in Ephesus until Pentecost; in 1 Cor

²⁵ For all this discussion, see J. Murphy-O'Connor, *op. cit.*, p. 4-8.

²⁶ See J. Murphy-O'Connor, *op. cit.*, p. 15-21.

²⁷ *Op. cit.*, p. 22.

²⁸ See all the arguments in J. Murphy-O'Connor, *op. cit.*, p. 22-23.

²⁹ *Op. cit.*, p. 61. J. Murphy-O'Connor never explains where this date of year 30 for Jesus death came from. But this date seems to make consensus among the community of exegetes. See John P. Meier, *A Marginal Jew - Rethinking the Historical Jesus, Doubleday* (The Anchor Bible Reference Library), New York, v. 1: *The Roots of the Problem and the Person*, 1991, p. 409.

³⁰ *Op. cit.*, p. 25.

³¹ *Op. cit.*, p. 27.

16:1, he refers to the collection for the saints and directions he gave to the churches of Galatia (the collection was initiated after the Jerusalem Conference), which means he had repeated visits. So probably Paul left Antioch in the spring of 52, visited again the churches of Galatia, and finally reached Ephesus by July or August 52. How long did he stay in Ephesus? Luke provides two answers: two years and three months in Acts 19:8-9, and three years in Acts 20:31. Assuming the latter is only a round figure, we can keep the first answer, which is a more plausible number. During his stint in Ephesus, Paul wrote his first letter to Corinthians (1 Cor 16:8), probably in April or May 54. But while in Ephesus, it seems that circumstances demanded a quick visit to Corinth (2 Cor 12:14; 13:1-2), a brief but painful visit (2 Cor 1:13 - 2:1), and returning to Ephesus shortly afterward. He would have left Ephesus in October 54 for Troas, then reaching Macedonia (2 Cor 2:13; 7:5), spending the winter of 54-55 over there. As he alluded to in 1 Cor 16:5 and 2 Cor 9:4, his plan was to revisit Corinth. An erupting crisis (see 2 Cor 10-13) while still preaching in Illyricum (Rom. 15:19) seemed to have brought him to Corinth earlier than planned, i.e. in the summer of 55. Most likely, Paul spent the winter of 55-56 in Corinth before leaving for Jerusalem with the Collection (Romans 15:25-26)³².

For what happened subsequently, we are dependant on Acts: his arrest by Lysias (21:33) should have taken place in 59 or 60, his transfer to Rome ought to have occurred before Festus' death in 62, and finally, in the aftermath of Nero's persecutions, he was most plausibly executed in 67.

If we follow J. Murphy-O'Connor³³, we are presented the following table.

Birth date	6 BC
Conversion	33 AD
In Arabia	34 AD
In Damascus	34-37 AD
First visit to Jerusalem	37 AD
In Syria and Cilicia (Tarsus)	37 - ?
In Antioch	Winter 45-46
Departure from Antioch	April 46
Journey to Galatia	April - September 46
Ministry in Galatia	September 46 - May 48
Journey to Macedonia	Summer 48
Ministry in Macedonia	September 48 - April 50
Journey to Corinth	April 50
Ministry in Corinth	April 50 - September 51
Journey to Jerusalem	September 51
Conference in Jerusalem	October 51
In Antioch	Winter 51-52
Journey to Ephesus	April - July 52
In Ephesus	August 52 - October 54
In Ephesus, 1 st letter to Corinthians	April or May 54
In Macedonia	Winter 54-55
In Illyricum	Summer 55
In Corinth	Winter 55-56
Journey to Jerusalem	Summer 56
In Jerusalem-Caesarea	57?-61?
Journey to Rome	September 61 - Spring 62
Rome	Spring 62 - Spring 64
Spain	Early Summer 64
Around the Aegean	64-66?
Death in Rome	67

Based on this table, we can make four observations with respect to 1 Corinthians: 1) Paul was an elder, i.e. 60 years old when he wrote this letter; 2) over 20 years have passed since his conversion; 3) he was not a newly converted man but one who had gained experience over teenagerhood in his ministry; 4) he became someone whose faith matured into adulthood.

b. Paul's Background

Although several books have been written on Paul for both scholars and lay people, we would like to study just a few points that may help us in our analysis of 1 Cor. In Rom. 11: 1 (*I myself am an Israelite, a descendant of Abraham, a member of the tribe of Benjamin*), Paul's prominence on his Jewish credentials might have been a factor in his positive support for the Conference of Jerusalem decision to send him to the Gentiles in the Diaspora (Gal 1:9). But where in the Diaspora? A hint is found in Gal 1:21 where Paul said he went to Syria and its capital Antioch, as well as Cilicia and its capital Tarsus. According to

³² For Paul's stay in Ephesus and his trip to Macedonia and Corinth, see Op. cit., p. 27-31.

³³ Op. cit., p. 8, 28 and 31.

Luke, Paul had a personal connection with Tarsus where he was born (Acts 9:11.30; 11:25; 21:39; 22:3). If this information is truthful, we should indicate a few things on Tarsus.

- In 42 BC, Mark Antony rewarded Tarsus for its loyalty by granting it the rare privilege of freedom and immunity, which was renewed afterwards.
- According to Strabo (*Geography* 14. 5. 13), the people of Tarsus were so devoted to education that they surpassed Athens and completed this education abroad.

In Phil 5:5 (*circumcised on the eighth day, a member of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew born of Hebrews; as to the law, a Pharisee*), Paul defines himself as a Hebrew born of Hebrews. The word *Hebraios* means a member of the Jewish people, but it also refers to someone who knows Hebrew language³⁴. Paul would have come from a family who, despite its location in the Diaspora, had kept its heritage of Jewish ancient language, and whose ancestors most plausibly had emigrated from Palestine.

Paulos is the Greek form of the Latin *Paul(I)us*. In his letters, the apostle uses only the Greek form. According to Luke, Paul also had a Hebrew name, *Saulos* (7:58; 8:1.3; 9:1) which vocative form *Saoul* is found in Acts 9:4.17; 22:7.13; 26:14. Not only Paul's parents would have given him the name of a very well-known member of the Benjamin tribe, but they later would have chosen *Paulus* as the most similar Latin name to the Hebraic name of *Saul*³⁵.

What about Paul's education? He personally tells us nothing about his youth, and so we could only make deductions on what he most likely received based on Tarsus educational systems and some traces about Paul's background in his letters. If we rely on Jewish contemporary authors (Philo, *Legatio at Gaium* 210; Josephus, *Against Apion* 2, 178), Paul should have learned the Septuagint, the Bible of Greek-speaking Jews. Living in a Hellenistic world, he would have most likely studied through a Hellenistic education program: Euripides, Homer, Menander and Demosthenes. In his *high-school* education, Paul might have attended classes of rhetoric, taking lectures from an orator, and learning the art of eloquence. We should not be deceived by some of his statements (for instance, 2 Cor 11:6 "I may be untrained in speech, but not in knowledge") and the conscious decision he made "to proclaim the gospel, and not with eloquent wisdom, so that the cross of Christ might not be emptied of its power" (1 Cor 1:17)³⁶.

Referring back to Strabo, it was customary for young men of Tarsus to complete their education abroad. We could conjecture that Paul would have elected to study the Jewish religion and tradition in his childhood Jerusalem. Pursuing the usual rhetoric curriculum, he would have left Tarsus around year 15, at about the age of 20³⁷. Luke tells us that he studied at the feet of Gamaliel (Acts 22:3), though not confirmed by Paul. However, he was a Pharisee (Phil 3:5) and according to J. P. Meier³⁸, the Pharisees were a political-religious group created at the Hasmonean time (150 BC) and were known not only for their strict interpretation of the law, but also admitting that some of their legal views and practices were not to be found as such in the written Mosaic Law, but instead in the venerable traditions (Gal 1:14 where Paul talks of himself as "Being extremely zealous for the traditions of my fathers"). Their focus was³⁹:

- Purity rules concerning food and vessels containing food and liquids.
- Purity rules concerning corpses and tombs.
- Purity or sanctity of the cult apparatus.
- Tithing, priests' shares and dues.
- Proper observance of the Sabbath and holy days.
- Marriage and divorce, including writing the bill of divorce and the grounds for divorce.

Pharisees were mainly located in Jerusalem and had no notable presence elsewhere, which supports Paul's presence in Jerusalem⁴⁰. Regarding Gamaliel, we know he was the successor of Hillel (*Mishna, Aboth* 1.18), and his years of activity are thought to be roughly around 30-40⁴¹, which time period would coincide with Paul's furthering his young adulthood education in Jerusalem, corroborating Luke on Gamaliel in (Acts 22:3).

³⁴ See Philo of Alexandria (*De Vita Mosis*, 2.32), referred to by J. Murphy-O'Connor, *op. cit.*, p. 36.

³⁵ J. Murphy-O'Connor, *op. cit.*, p. 41-46.

³⁶ For Paul's education, see J. Murphy-O'Connor, *op. cit.*, p. 46-51. He quotes C. Forbes (*Comparison, Self-Praise and Irony: Paul's Boasting and the Conventions of Hellenistic Rhetoric*, *NTS* 32 (1986), p. 23): "What we have seen of Paul's rhetoric suggests a mastery and an assurance unlikely to have been gained without long practice, and possibly long study as well". As to the Hellenistic education, he relies on H.-I. Marrou, *Histoire de l'éducation dans l'antiquité*. Paris: Seuil, 1948.

³⁷ J. Murphy-O'Connor, *op. cit.*, p. 52. He gives the example of Rabbi Eliezer ben Hyrcanus who was 21 when he went to study in Jerusalem (*Aboth of Rabbi Nathan*. Version A, 6)

³⁸ John P. Meier, *A Marginal Jew - Rethinking the Historical Jesus*. Doubleday (The Anchor Bible Reference Library): New York, 2011: v. 3, *Companions and Competitors*, p. 289-388.

³⁹ J. P. Meier, *op. cit.*, p. 320-321.

⁴⁰ "In Mark 7:1, Mark depicts the Pharisees and some of the scribes coming from Jerusalem" to Jesus. (This statement that the Pharisees come from Jerusalem may, like John's Gospel, preserve the memory that the pre-70 Pharisees were centered in Jerusalem and did not enjoy a notable presence in Galilee.), J. P. Meier, *op. cit.*, p. 317. J. Murphy-O'Connor follows the same path: "With the exception of Mark 12:13 (cf. 11: 15) and 10: 2, not a single Markan story in which the Pharisees figure contains any element which would permit us to identify the location", *op. cit.*, p. 56. And he added: "Individual Pharisees may have gone to Galilee sporadically to check crops which they intended to buy, but there is no evidence of anything remotely resembling a Pharisaic movement in Galilee", *op. cit.*, p. 57-58.

⁴¹ J. Murphy-O'Connor, *op. cit.*, p. 55.

Was Paul married? Our keenness on studying Paul's statements relevant to marital relationship, triggers this question: Was Paul married? While writing 1 Corinthians, he was single (7:8; 9:5). But was he a widower or had he ever been married? A few commentators reject the possibility of a good Jewish never being married, which should take place between 18 and 20 years of age. But Simeon ben Azzai (c. AD 110) justified the celibate lifestyle by his words, 'My soul is in love with the Torah'⁴². Such a behaviour requires a high degree of personal security rooted in past achievement, as well as encouragement from friends and teachers, which contrasts with Paul's attempts to stand by tradition and be more zealous than other Jews: "I advanced in Judaism beyond many among my people of the same age, for I was far more zealous for the traditions of my ancestors" (Gal 1:14). According to Eusebius (History of Church, 3.30.1), Clement of Alexandria (Stromata, 3.6.52) would have said that Paul's wife was alluded to in Phil 4:3 when he addressed "his yoke-fellow, whom he did not take round with him for fear of hindering his ministry" (this interpretation is possible if *γνήσιε* (loyal) in the expression: *γνήσιε σύζυγε* (loyal yoke-fellow), would be feminine, and not masculine as it is now)⁴³. Should Paul have been married, what happened to his wife? Murphy-O'Connor proposes an astonishing scheme where his wife and children would have died tragically in an earthquake (Jerusalem was located in an earthquake zone) or in a plague epidemic, which would explain Paul's silence about his wife and the anger that triggered his persecution of the church⁴⁴.

On the verge of his conversion, what did Paul know about Jesus? According to 2 Cor 5:16 (even though we once knew Christ from a human point of view, we know him no longer in that way), he did have limited knowledge, but to what extent? We can work our way through deduction, by using a contemporary figure like Josephus, who claimed to be a Pharisee. In his Antiquities of the Jews (20.199-200), describing James' death, he wrote: "He (Annanus) assembled the Sanhedrin of judges, and brought before them the brother of Jesus, who was called Christ, whose name was James, and some others". Two points need to be highlighted: 1) The name 'James' was so common that Josephus was forced to specify him by reference to his better-known brother Jesus; 2) the name 'Jesus' was also so widespread that it too demanded a qualifier, Christ (or Messiah). Why Christ, and not "from Nazareth" as in Mark 1:24? A simple answer is that statement about Jesus' role as Messiah enjoyed sufficiently wide circulation to be understandable even among those who rejected it. The other reference to Jesus from Josephus is the *Testimonium Flavianum* found in Antiquities of the Jews (8.63-64), a passage corrupted by a Christian scribe who introduced his own faith. After removing the Christian additions, we end up with a text where Jesus is presented as a wise man and teacher of those with an appetite for novelties, winning over many Jews and Gentiles, who continue to love him and did not forsake him despite the fact that he was condemned to death on a cross by Pontius Pilate⁴⁵. What Josephus is providing is really bare bone information; Paul plausibly knew Christ more than that, especially through Christians' behaviour, namely on respecting Jesus' authority to bypass requirements of the law on the Sabbath or on purity rules, downplaying those rules dear to Pharisees. Paul would have also known about the Christian claim of Jesus' resurrection, an action by God in support of the Messiah.

What did Christian conversion mean to Paul? The Apostle says: "Have I not seen (*έώρακα*) Jesus our Lord?" (1 Cor 9:1); "Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared (*ώφθη*) also to me" (1 Co 15:8). There were so many points that Jesus and Pharisees shared that it is worthwhile mentioning them⁴⁶:

- The consuming desire to bring all Israel to the complete doing of God's will as laid out in the Law and the prophets.
- The belief of God's free election of Israel.
- His gift of the Law.
- The need to respond wholeheartedly to the Law's demands in one's everyday life.
- God's faithful guidance of Israel through history to a future consummation involving the restoration of Israel.
- A final judgment.
- The resurrection of the dead.
- Some sort of eschatological or messianic figure as God's agent in the end of time.

The Christians' true claim that God intervened to raise Christ from the dead, who the Pharisees considered a false teacher with blasphemous claim to be the Messiah, went hand in hand with deliberate subversion of the law's authority; from there onward, Paul's pharisaic foundation just fell apart, and his conversion sparked new thinking: 'For I would have you know, brethren, that the gospel preached by me is not according to man, for I did not receive it from man nor was I taught it but [it came] through a revelation of Jesus Christ' (Gal 1:11– 12)⁴⁷.

Paul's dual culture might very well be reflected in his authorship of 1 Cor; by living through the Hellenic and Jewish cultures, Paul could bring the best of both to his 1 Corinthians composition. On the one hand, as a Pharisee, he developed the capacity to analyze the law and interpret it, using Jewish tradition of the Fathers, and so was able to see its impact on the daily life; additionally, he believed in God's faithful guidance of his people, in the final judgment, in the resurrection of the dead, and in

⁴² Op. cit., p. 62.

⁴³ This point is brought in op. cit., p. 63.

⁴⁴ Op. cit., p. 63-70. Murphy-O'Connor's stance on Paul's anger: "As to the pre-70 period, there is no hint of any aggression by the Pharisees directed against those who disagreed with them. And so Paul's fight against Christians is a personal initiative, triggered by his anger, especially in the context where Jewish nationalistic aspirations were inevitably brought into conflict with Rome, and unity was imperative if the Jews were to survive such a conflict".

⁴⁵ J. Murphy-O'Connor, Op. cit., p. 73-79.

⁴⁶ These points are presented by J. P. Meier, op. cit., p. 338.

⁴⁷ See J. Murphy-O'Connor, op. cit., p. 78.

the figure the Messiah at the end of time; moreover, Paul was aware of a process for divorce (Mark 10, 4). On the other hand, through conversion, as a Christian, he discovered that: the end of time has started, the Messiah has come, and the new law was Christ. Whether living as a widower or a bachelor did not prevent Paul from giving objective advice to both married and unmarried, based on both his religious education and theological experience.

2. The Church of Corinth: Foundation and Characteristics

We first need to figure out who is Paul's letter audience. Then, we will try to establish the milestones of Corinth's history, geography, culture and religion, before mapping the components of its Christian community.

a. The City of Corinth

J. Murphy-O'Connor's⁴⁸ work on Corinth, presenting classical Greek and Latin authors referring to Corinth, provides a wealth of information. The history of Corinth can be divided into two periods. At the outset, there was the Greek city-state that had flourished in the fifth century B.C. which was destroyed by Roman Consul Lucius Mummius in 146 BC. For about a century, it was deserted, though not entirely unoccupied (cf. Cicero)⁴⁹ prior to being revitalized in 44 BC as a Roman colony by Julius Cesar, who renamed it Colonia Laus Julia Corinthiensis. Constantly thriving, it first became the capital of the entire province of Achaia in 27 BC, and was promoted as the capital of the Achaean Senatorial Province in 44 AD; it was then governed by a proconsul⁵⁰.

Corinth's geographical location on the Isthmus, bridging the Peloponnesus and the mainland, was strategic to commerce, since featuring two harbours: the first, Cenchræe facing east across the Saronic Gulf, leading straight to Asia and Ephesus; the second, Lechaëum facing north-west across the Corinthian Gulf to Italy and the west, making easy the exchange of merchandise. As the narrowest point of the Isthmus is 5950 meters, sailors were trying to avoid the dangerous sea of the Peloponnesus, and hence were conveniently using the *diolkos*, a paved road stretching from Cenchræe to Lechaëum on which small ships were pulled, otherwise cargo loads had to be un-loaded in one port, and moved to the other port to be re-loaded⁵¹.

In light of its strategic position, Corinth, like nowadays port city, experienced a great influx of people both from the West, dominant Romans bringing their laws, religions and cultures, as well as from the East, Egyptians conveying their enigmatic cults and Jews praying to their single God in synagogues; all of whom populating Corinth with thousands of artisans and slaves, well-off and poor people, who made both vice and religion flourish side by side in the money-freely-fleeing city. In a nutshell, Corinth was a cosmopolitan city situated at commercial, cultural, philosophical and religious crossroads; its citizens' interests were characterized by remarkable diversity and widespread freedom. This was illustrated by the Isthmian games taking place in Corinth every second year, where women participated both in the 200 meters race and in the war-chariots⁵². Furthermore, both Latin and Greek were spoken in the city; when Corinth was revitalized as a Roman city, Latin became its official language even in Paul's time, although Greek would have re-established itself as its official language by the time of Pausanias (AD 110 –180)⁵³.

Cultural diversity also entails religious diversity, demonstrated in Corinth's various temples where worship of traditional gods and goddesses from Greek (Poseidon, Apollo, Hermes, Demeter, Asklepios) and Roman (Jupiter, Venus) religions, as well as local divinities from further east such as the Egyptian deities Isis and Serapis, took place. Roman cults were especially important to the city's elite, and the imperial cult—in which the Emperor, his ancestors, and his family were venerated—formed an important part of religious and political life. On the top of the Acrocorinth, there was the goddess Aphrodite temple, offering over one thousand sacred prostitutes⁵⁴, that had fallen into ruins by Paul's time. However, successors to its cult, prostitutes continued to ply their profession in the city's lower-town. Moreover, the verb *korinthiazestha*, to be called "a Corinthian" (coined by Aristophanes [450-385 BC]) was synonymous to loose, riotous living⁵⁵.

b. Characteristics of the Church of Corinth

According to Murphy-O'Connor, Corinth was a bustling city, a wide-open boomtown. He adds: "San Francisco in the days of the California gold rush is perhaps the most illuminating parallel"⁵⁶. Thus, one can expect huge opportunities to make money,

⁴⁸ Jerome Murphy-O'Connor, *St. Paul's Corinth: Texts and Archaeology*. Collegeville: Michael Glazier, 1983, 256 p.

⁴⁹ J. Murphy-O'Connor, *op. cit.*, p. 8.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 68 and 131. See also Christophe Senft, *La première épître de Saint Paul aux Corinthiens*. Lausanne : Delachaux & Niestlé, 1979, p. 15.

⁵¹ J. Murphy-O'Connor, *op. cit.*, p. 61.

⁵² *Op. cit.*, p. 12-15. Murphy-O'Connor believes that Paul could not have been unaware of the Isthmian games, and was probably in Corinth when they took place, whether he himself attended the games. But he adds that the very fact that women were involved in war-chariots goes some way toward explaining the liberated Corinthian women whom Paul encountered (cf. 1 Cor. 11:2-16).

⁵³ *Op. cit.*, p. 8: "Of the 104 texts which are prior to the reign of Hadrian (AD 117-138) 101 are in Latin and only three in Greek, a virtual monopoly of the Latin language."

⁵⁴ According to Hans Conzelmann, *1 Corinthians. A Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 191, p. 12, this is fable created by Strabo, *Geography* (8.378).

⁵⁵ J. Murphy-O'Connor, *op. cit.*, p. 56.

⁵⁶ J. Murphy-O'Connor, *Paul. A Critical Life*, p. 108.

as the “immense volume of trade was augmented by the huge numbers of travellers⁵⁷”. This seems as well reflected by what we can understand of the church of Corinth, where only a few would have been wealthy⁵⁸. For instance, Erastus⁵⁹, the city treasurer (Rom. 16:23; 2 Tim. 4:19), according to an inscription found in Corinth, provided funding to pavement around the theatre. Another example is Gaius⁶⁰, who was baptized by Paul (1 Cor 1:14) and hosted Paul as well as the whole church (Rom. 16:23), needed to have a very large house. Should Luke be reliable, the same comment could be made on Jason (Acts 17:6), and likewise on Stephanas⁶¹, also baptized by Paul (1 Cor 1:16), who devoted himself to servicing the poor (1 Cor 16:15). Lastly, Crispus who was as well baptized by Paul (1 Cor 1:14) and, according to Acts 18:8, was the official (*ἀρχισυνάγωγος*) of the synagogue, must have been well off to hold that position⁶². Aquila and Prisca certainly had some means since they were able to host the church (1 Cor 16:19) and to travel (Acts 18:2,18; Rom. 16:3; 2 Tim. 4:19). Finally, Phoebe, a deacon of the church at Cenchreae, who was a benefactor of many and of Paul too (1 Cor 16:1-2). In contrast to wealth, there usually exists poverty not that far away, and it was no exception in the Christian community of Corinth as reflected by the Eucharist gathering when Paul says: “For when the time comes to eat, each of you goes ahead with your own supper, and one goes hungry and another becomes drunk” (1 Cor 11:21). And even those having possessions needed to be reminded of their promise with respect to the collection for the saints: “The point is this: the one who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and the one who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully” (2 Cor 9:6).

We have seen that Corinth was a large cosmopolitan city of about 500,000 people⁶³, reflected in its community’s composition. Using names as our reference, we notice Latin names (Titius, Justus, Aquila, Prisca, Fortunatus, Gaius), as well as Greek names (Stephanas, Jason, Phoebe); some of these were of Jewish origin (2 Cor 11:22), like Sosipater and Jason (Rom. 16:21), and as well Aquila, Prisca, Crispus, and Sosthenes, while others were of Gentile origin (1 Cor 8:7; 12:2), like Erastus and Justus⁶⁴. Paul even mentions Christian slaves who were not about to become free men (1 Cor 7:21-33). In as much as there were public figures in the community like Erastus, city treasurer, probably well educated, in contrast there were also people to whom Paul says: “not many of you were wise by human standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth” (1 Cor 1:26); as well as those he referred to as “weak”, “not having the knowledge or educational background” to understand that there was no impact in eating meat from the market previously offered to idols, as idols don’t exist (1 Cor 8:1-13). The clash between the educated and the un-educated reflects the spirit of freedom that spread out in the community. Therefore, the traditional customs or rules were no longer binding. So, Paul enticed to take action, said: “But take care that this liberty of yours does not somehow become a stumbling block to the weak” (1 Cor 8:9). This liberty is also shown by women in the city where they could participate in the isthmian games, and in the community where women threw away their veil and dared speaking in public. Paul found disgraceful those ones who were unveiled (1 Cor 11:2-16) and asked them to shut up (1 Cor 14:34), which was typical of a community where status quo was not an option. J. Murphy O’Connor estimates that the overall number of community members was at least 40 believers⁶⁵.

While religious diversity was vibrant in Corinth, it had an impact on the Christian community. For even though someone was baptized and started to believe in Jesus Christ, his religious background may influence the way he lives and celebrates his faith. So we should not be surprised to find out that Paul was facing divisions (*σχίσματα*) in the community (1 Cor 1:10). Although he has preached the same Gospel to everyone, not all listened and interpreted it in the same way. How did Corinthians understand the phrase preached to Galatians: “For freedom Christ has set us free” (Gal 5:1)? Their reaction on that phrase was such that Paul had to say: “All things are lawful for me,” but not all things are beneficial”. “All things are lawful for me, but I will not be dominated by anything” (1 Cor 6:12; 10:23). This freedom principle seems to rest on “knowledge” (1 Cor 8:1), and the latter derives from experience of the Spirit (12:4)⁶⁶, which evolved to speaking in tongues (14:5).

J. Murphy-O’Connor suspects that Apollos was one of the root causes of the division in the community, appealing to those aspiring to real speculative theology. Being from Alexandria, the city of Philo, Apollos philosophical approach was Philonic with the distinction between the heavenly and earthly man, whose body is evil by nature and a plotter against the soul, while the wise man is free, having the power to do anything and to live as he wishes⁶⁷. Emphasis on the spirit and disparagement of the

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 208.

⁵⁸ W. A. Meeks, *The First Urban Christians. The Social World of the Apostle Paul*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1983, p. 55-63.

⁵⁹ The inscription AD 50–100, cut into the pavement between the North Market and the theatre at Corinth, read “[—] Erastus in return for his aedileship paved (this area) at his own expense”. J. Murphy-O’Connor, *op. cit.*, p. 268.

⁶⁰ “An extra-large house was necessary to accommodate the entire community. Gaius, in consequence, must have been wealthier than the average believer”. *Ibid.*, p. 267.

⁶¹ “The leadership role assumed by Stephanas and his family in the community (1 Cor. 16: 15) implies a degree of leisure difficult to associate with those who had to sweat for every morsel of food... Equally the freedom of Stephanas to take part in the delegation to Ephesus (1 Cor. 16: 17) means either that he was successfully self-employed or did not need to work”. *Idem.*

⁶² According to Murphy-O’Connor, *ἀρχισυνάγωγος* was an honorific title awarded by a community in gratitude for a donation to their place of prayer (e.g. a whole building or parts thereof, a mosaic floor, a chancel screen, mural and ceiling paintings). *Idem.*

⁶³ This number comes from Michel Quesnel, *Les épîtres aux Corinthiens* (Cahiers Évangile, 22), p. 12, and as well from his *Saint Paul et les commencements du christianisme*. Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 2008, p. 43.

⁶⁴ J. Murphy-O’Connor, *op. cit.*, p. 273.

⁶⁵ J. Murphy-O’Connor, *op. cit.*, p. 277.

⁶⁶ This analysis and what follows are from Hans Conzelmann, *1 Corinthians. A Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians*, p. 14-16.

⁶⁷ J. Murphy O’Connor, *op. cit.*, p. 280-282.

body would explain some behaviors in the community, like the importance attached to speaking-in-tongues or discarding resurrection of the body.

In an environment where the focus is on experiences of the Spirit and knowledge, what happens on the level of ethics, for practical behavior that could take two directions? On the one hand, there could be a disconnection between spirit and body, as we will observe later on with the Gnostics movement, in which a few Christians unsurprisingly see no problem in intercourses with prostitutes for whom the city was famed, since only faith and the spirit matter. Paul had to challenge them with a theology of the body, saying: "Do you not know that whoever is united to a prostitute becomes one body with her? [...] your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you [...] therefore glorify God in your body" (1 Cor 6:15-20). On the other hand, the disconnection between spirit and body may lead in the opposite direction, on striving to become an angel for dismissing any earthly desire, as in ascetic movement. Was this behind the question of some Corinthians: "Is it well for a man not to touch a woman?" (1 Cor 7:1)?

Given what we have discovered so far, the Corinthian church is a very close picture of its city. Understandably, Paul is about to be dealing with various situations where he will need to tap into his theological and pastoral skills.

3. Literary Context of 1 Corinthians 7

a. The Overall Context of 1 Corinthians

The overall context of 1 Corinthians may be dependent on how we answer the question regarding the unity of this letter. Is 1 Corinthians one long single letter⁶⁸? Or an amalgamation of two⁶⁹ or three⁷⁰ or four letters⁷¹? Paul would have written more than two letters to the Corinthians; in 1 Cor 5:9, he says: "I wrote to you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral persons". Where is this letter? While some exegetes respond that it is lost⁷², others view it as part of our current 1 Corinthians⁷³, or it is 2 Cor 6:14-7:1 (Do not be mismatched with unbelievers...)⁷⁴. In 2 Cor 2:4, he says: "For I wrote you out of much distress and anguish of heart with many tears, not to cause you pain, but to let you know the abundant love that I have for you". Could we not locate this letter? Some exegetes see it in 2 Cor 10:1-13:10 ("I myself, Paul, appeal to you by the meekness and gentleness of Christ..."). The main reason to split 1 Corinthians in several letters is related to the various topics found in the letter that appear without any connecting logic⁷⁵.

Making a decision about the unity of 1 Corinthians has an impact on explaining the sequence of events that triggers its composition or its components. While trying to determine the sequence of events, one needs to factor in 3 passages: the role of Chloe's people (1 Cor 1:11: *For it has been reported to me by Chloe's people that there are quarrels among you*), the letter sent by the community of Corinth (1 Cor 7:1: *Now concerning the matters about which you wrote*), and the presence at Ephesus of community officials (1 Cor 16:17: *I rejoice at the coming of Stephanas and Fortunatus and Achaicus, because they have made up for your absence*).

A possible sequence of events could look like this:

- i. In the spring of 53, Corinthian merchants returning to Ephesus at the beginning of the new trading season, or maybe Apollos (who was then in Ephesus according to 1 Cor 16:12) himself returning to Ephesus after a stint in Corinth (Act 19:1), could have brought the bad news to Paul about events unfolding in the Corinthian community. Paul reacted by writing the "lost letter" where he told them 'not to associate with sexually immoral people' (1 Cor 5:9)⁷⁶.

⁶⁸ This is the position of H. Conzelmann, *op. cit.*, p. 4 and J. Murphy O'Connor, *op. cit.*, p. 253.

⁶⁹ This is the position of W. Schmithals, quoted by H. Conzelmann, *ibid.*, p. 3.

⁷⁰ This is the position of J. Weiss, quoted by H. Conzelmann, *ibid.*, p. 3.

⁷¹ C. Senft sees in 1 Corinthians the amalgamation of four letters, *op. cit.*, p. 17-19.

⁷² This is the position of M. Quesnel, *Saint Paul et les commencements du christianisme*, p. 44.

⁷³ For instance, C. Senft sees this letter, let's name it letter A, in 1 Cor. 6:1-11 ("When any of you has a grievance against another, do you dare to take it to court before the unrighteous"), 15:1-58 ("Now I would remind you, brothers and sisters, of the good news that I proclaimed to you, which you in turn received... what I in turn had received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures"), and 16:13-24 ("Keep alert, stand firm in your faith, be courageous, be strong... My love be with all of you in Christ Jesus").

⁷⁴ For instance, J. Weiss, quoted by H. Conzelmann, *ibid.*, p. 3, and J. Héring, quoted by J. Murphy-O'Connor, p. 255.

⁷⁵ C. Senft (*op. cit.*, p. 17-18) pinpoints four major inconsistencies in 1 Cor.: 1) 4:14-20 looks like a conclusion (But I will come to you soon, if the Lord wills...), announcing Paul's arrival, in some way duplicating and contradicting 16, 5 (I will visit you after passing through Macedonia); 2) 1:10ff presents a wide and passionate discussion on divisions in the community, in some way duplicating and contradicting 11:17ff where Paul just "heard" about the division (I hear that there are divisions among you; and to some extent I believe it) and recognizes that it may play a useful role (for only so will it become clear who among you are genuine); 3) 10:1-22 provides a severe warning against idolatry while 8:1-13 and 10:23-11:1 are only focused on limits to freedom out of consideration for the brother; 4) almost all through the letter Paul can serenely speak with the authority of an apostle, but out of sudden in chap. 1-4 and 9:1-18 his authority seems in jeopardy and he needs to stress his credentials (Am I not an apostle? Have I not seen Jesus our Lord?). On top of these inconsistencies, giving the fact that Paul left Corinth in 52 and 1 Corinthians has been written in 54, it makes no sense for Senft that Paul would have waited so long before communicating with the community he founded.

⁷⁶ See J. Murphy-O'Connor, *op. cit.*, p. 275.

- ii. A year later, when the spring sailing season began, a wealthy businesswoman of Ephesus, Chloe (1 Cor 1:11), sent some of her employees to Corinth, as new goods probably arrived from the west, maybe Italy. It could have been employees' initiative to get in contact with the Corinthian community, or a request from Paul, likely interested in the impact of his "lost letter"⁷⁷. In any event, the report's content was disgraceful: an incestuous marriage (1 Cor 5:1-8), headdress for those presiding at the liturgy (1 Cor 11:2-16)⁷⁸, drunkenness at the Eucharist (1 Cor 11:17-34), and probably other observations, namely the factional divisions. Paul's immediate response was to send Timothy for his investigation (1 Cor 4:17: *For this reason I sent you Timothy, who is my beloved and faithful child in the Lord*).
- iii. While Timothy was in Corinth, Stephanas, Fortunatus, and Achaicus (1 Cor 16:15-17) came to Ephesus carrying a letter from that city's church asking for Paul's advice on numerous issues (1 Cor 7:1). With this delegation in Ephesus, Paul could have had all the information needed before Timothy's return; and so he wrote letter 1 Corinthians: "written sometime before June 2nd, the date of Pentecost (1 Cor 16:8) in AD 54"⁷⁹.

This plausible sequence of events assumes a few things:

- the "lost letter" is not to be reconstructed from any part of 1 Corinthians or 2 Corinthians⁸⁰;
- Chloe's people were the ones who reported on: the incestuous marriage (1 Cor 5:1-8), the headdress for those presiding at the liturgy (1 Cor 11:2-16), drunkenness at the Eucharist (1 Cor 11:17-34), and the factional divisions, rather than Stephanas, Fortunatus, and Achaicus⁸¹.
- Chloe's people report precedes the letter sent by the church of Corinth asking for Paul's advice⁸².
- Stephanas, Fortunatus, and Achaicus were the ones who brought the letter on behalf of the Corinthian church seeking advice, and not Chloe's people⁸³.

Moreover, this sequence assumes the unity of 1 Corinthians. The main reason for this assumption is that most likely no one in the history of 1 Cor analysis has been successful in bringing critical evidence by establishing with high probability the complex scheme of this letter. And because eye-witness evidence does not exist, there are as many proposals for the history of its composition as there are exegetes rejecting the unity of the letter. If we assume that the letter was dictated by Paul over a period of a few weeks, many events could have taken place plausibly explaining its change in tone, elaboration of arguments, or repeating topics already covered. H. Conzelmann, who accepts the unity of the letter, wrote: "There is no conclusive proof of different situations within 1 Corinthians. The existing breaks can be explained from the circumstances of its composition. Even its complexity that gives the strongest offence, chapters 8-10, can be understood as a unity"⁸⁴. J. Murphy O'Connor, who also accepts this letter unity, wrote: "all the so-called internal contradictions in 1 Corinthians can be resolved by a more exacting exegesis"⁸⁵. Those rejecting the unity of this letter would like to find a more cohesive stream of thought, which doesn't fit real life⁸⁶.

b. The Context of 1 Corinthians 7

If we acknowledge the unity of 1 Corinthians, then the context of chapter 7 could represent the whole letter. As Paul addresses different issues brought to his attention by different people, we could split this long letter according to those answers he provides. We could assume this chronological sequence: firstly, matters forwarded by Chloe's people; secondly, questions that came from the letter brought by the church's delegates; thirdly, issues spelled out orally by delegates. There are intricacies in distinguishing what originated from the letter, and what came from those delegates. The church's letter onset is clearly introduced with *Περί δὲ ὧν ἐγράψατε* (7:1: *Then concerning what you have written*). However, *Περί δὲ* (*Then concerning*) recurs five more times (7:25; 8:1; 12:1; 16:1; 16:12), some of which might not refer to the same letter from Corinth, since Stephanas or Fortunatus or Achaicus or church delegates could have brought issues on their own. By assuming that those shameful issues, conveyed by these delegates, were excluded from the letter, then we could infer from 12:1

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 278.

⁷⁸ According to J. Murphy-O'Connor, Chloe's people may have "participated in one of the liturgical assemblies, and were shocked at the leading role taken by a man, who was apparently homosexual, and a very strange woman", *op. cit.*, p. 289. In identifying the male as a homosexual, see his *Sex and Logic in 1 Corinthians 11: 2–6*, *CBO* (1980)42: 482–500, and *1 Corinthians 11: 2–26 Once Again*, *CBO* (1988)50: 265–74.

⁷⁹ J. Murphy-O'Connor, *op. cit.*, p. 280.

⁸⁰ For an alternate view: C. Senft, *op. cit.*, p. 19, and as well J. Weiss and W. Schmithals quoted by H. Conzelmann, *op. cit.*, p. 3.

⁸¹ For an alternate view: C. Senft, *op. cit.*, p. 20, except for the incestuous marriage (1 Cor. 5:1-8) that came to Paul's attention somehow later on.

⁸² For an alternate view: C. Senft, *op. cit.*, p. 21, who believes 1 Cor. 1:1 - 4:21 (divisions in the community) to be a letter on its own, sent after Paul replied to the church of Corinth asking for his advice, and based on information from Chloe's people that mentioned only this issue.

⁸³ For an alternate view: W. Schmithals quoted by H. Conzelmann, *op. cit.*, p. 4.

⁸⁴ H. Conzelmann, *idem*. He brings an argument supporting the unity of 1 Corinthians by noticing a similar structure in the letter to Romans: 1 Cor. 1:18ff (language of the cross) || Rom. 1:18ff; 1 Cor. 8–10 (eating meat offered to idols) || Rom. 14:1–15:6; 1 Cor. 12 (gifts of the spirit) || Rom. 12:3ff; 1 Cor 15:19.44-49 (Christ, new Adam) || Rom. 5:12ff. See *op. cit.*, p. 5.

⁸⁵ J. Murphy-O'Connor, *op. cit.*, p. 253.

⁸⁶ A typical example is C. Senft, *op. cit.*, p. 22-23, who sees in Paul's response on the first issues of meat offered to idols (letters A and B) the beginning of his thinking, a reference to the holiness of God's people and brother's love. Then he sees in asceticism and libertinism (letter C, advice requested by the church of Corinth) a real threat to God's free grace and the requirement to live freely in accordance to God's gift, triggering his thinking on the body, and more specifically on the Church as Christ's body. And finally, his thought deploys fully when tackling letter D on the divisions in the community (1 Cor. 1:1 – 4:21) when he presents his theology of the cross.

onward, that all of the *Περί δε* instances refer to issues communicated only orally to Paul. Therefore, we could now propose the following structure where 1 Corinthians is mapped out by each of Paul's seven answers⁸⁷.

Introduction to the letter (1:1-9)

- I. Source of information: Chloe's people (1:10 – 6:20)
 1. Answer related to divisions in the community (1:10 – 4:21)
 2. Answer related to serious disorder in the community (5:1 – 6:20)
 - a. Sexual immorality (5:1-13)
 - b. Church and relationship with the world (6:1-11)
 - c. Freedom and sexuality (6:12-20)
- II. Source of information: letter from the church of Corinth (7:1 – 11:1)
 1. Answer related to marriage and celibacy (7:1-40)
 2. Answer related to meat offered to idols and participation in city life (8:1 – 11:1)
- III. Source of information: Stephanas, Fortunatus, and Achaicus (11:2 – 16:11)
 1. Answer related to behaviour in church gathering (11:2 – 14:40)
 2. Answer related to the resurrection of the body (15:1-58)
 3. Answer related to collection for the saints (16:1-11)

Conclusion of the letter (16:12-24)

1 Cor 7:1-40 incorporates a multilateral calling-relationship schema raised by Corinthian believers in their letter to Paul, which has no connection with those shameful issues. The whole letter stands as a unique topic on its own, and we cannot find in what precedes it or what follows it any special light that would help understand it better. Nevertheless, the overall structure shows that Paul practices applied theology, not theology based on timeless principles⁸⁸.

B. Establishing the Text to Be Analyzed

1. Text Delimitation and Structure

While researching the **Context of 1 Corinthians 7**, we discovered that Paul's expression *Περί δε* (Then concerning) introduced several topics, some coming from previous letters, and others from oral feedback. Additionally, the section 7:1 – 11:1, where three times *Περί δε* appears, highly likely refers to the Corinthians letter. Chapter 8:1, also introduced with *Περί δε*, refers to the question of meat offered to idols, and so explores a different topic. Thus chapter 7 represents a unity of its own.

Upon examining chapter 7, we find that Paul addresses different issues from a question conveyed to him:

- introduction '*Then about things you have written*': (v.1)
- Marital responsibilities (v. 2-7)
- The situation of unmarried and widowed people (v. 8-9)
- Believing spouses (v. 10-11)
- Mixed marriages (v. 12-16)
- God's call for you (v. 17-24)
- Virgins (v. 25-38)
- Widows (v.39-40)

Let's study Paul's logic in his composition of chapter 7.

A. Topic: Sexual intercourse in marriage (v. 1-7)

a) Question from Corinthians (v. 1)

- i. It is good for a man not to touch a woman

b) Answer from Paul in the form of an exception: to avoid promiscuity, let's have married couple (v. 2)

c) Answer extended with couples' duties (v. 3-5)

- i. Let the husband render what is due to the wife
- ii. [let] the wife [render what is due] to the husband

c.1 Why these duties? (v. 4)

⁸⁷ This structure follows closely what is proposed by Maurice Carrez, *Les épîtres aux Corinthiens* in *Lettres de Paul, de Jacques, Pierre et Jude*. Paris: Desclée, 1983, p. 63.

⁸⁸ This is pinpointed by H. Conzelmann, *op. cit.*, p. 9.

- i. The wife does not have authority of her own body but the husband,
- ii. the husband does not have authority of his own body, but the wife

c.2 Possible exception (v. 5)

- i. In order to devote yourself to prayer
- ii. But only for a time and requires a common agreement
- iii. And get together as soon as possible because of your debility

d) Conclusion (v. 6-7)

- i. This is a permission, not a command (v. 6)
- ii. I would prefer people be single like me (v. 7a)
- iii. But it all depends on God's gift (v. 7b)

B. Topic: The Unmarried and the Widowed (v. 8-9)

- a) A slogan, i.e. ideal: it is good for unmarried and widows to stay single (v. 8)
- b) Pastoral answer: for those unable to self control, be married (v. 9)

C. Topic: Marriage and divorce (v. 10-11)

- a) Basic guideline: the Lord saying on marriage and divorce (v. 10a)
- b) Addressing a specific situation in Corinth
 - i. a wife should not allow to be separated from a husband (v. 10b)
 - ii. if she happened to separate, let her remain unmarried (v. 11a),
 - iii. or be reconcile with [her] husband (11a)
 - iv. a husband should not dismiss [his] wife (v. 11b)

D. Topic: Mixed marriages (v. 12-16)

- a) Message from Paul, not the Lord, (v. 12-13)
 - i. a brother should not dismiss an unbelieving wife if she consents to live with him (v. 12)
 - ii. a wife should not dismiss an unbelieving husband if he consents to live with her (v. 13)
- b) Why? (v. 14)
 - i. the unbelieving husband has been made holy through the wife
 - ii. the unbelieving wife has been made holy through the brother
 - iii. Otherwise indeed your children would be unclean, but now [in fact] they are holy
- c) Exception (v. 15-16)
 - i. if the unbeliever separates, let him separate
 - 1. Why?
 - the brother or the sister is not bound in such things
 - God has called you to peace
 - Salvation goal may not be met
 - It is not sure that a wife will save her husband
 - It is not sure that a husband will save her wife

E. Topic: Other cases beside those just mentioned (v. 17-24)

- a) General principle: Stay where you were when God called you (v. 17)
- b) Application of principle to circumcision (v. 18-20)
 - i. To the circumcised, do not remove the marks of circumcision (v. 18a)
 - ii. To the uncircumcised, do not seek circumcision (v. 18b)
 - iii. What matter are the commandments of God (v. 19)
 - Conclusion: remain in the condition in which you were called (v. 20)
- c) Application of principle to slave (v. 21-24)
 - i. Do not seek freedom even if you can (v. 21)
 - ii. Why (v. 22-23)
 - The slave is a freed person belonging to the Lord
 - He has been bought by Christ
 - Conclusion: In whatever condition, remain with God (v. 24)

F. Topic: The virgins (v. 25-38)

- a) General principle from Paul: remain as you are (v. 26)

- Why: the impending distress
- b) Application to a husband bound to wife: do not seek to be free (v. 27a)
 - c) Application to a man who is single: do not seek a wife (v. 27b)
 - d) Exception:
 - i. If a man married, he does not sin (v. 28a)
 - ii. If a virgin marries, she does not sin (v. 28b)
 - e) Warning:
 - i. Fact: the appointed time has grown short (v. 29a)
 - ii. Requirements: (v. 29b-31)
 - those who have wives be as though they had none
 - those who mourn as though they were not mourning
 - those who rejoice as though they were not rejoicing
 - those who buy as though they had no possessions
 - those who deal with the world as though they had not dealings with it
 - f) Paul's overall goal: to be free of worries (v. 32-35)
 - i. Application to marriage (v. 32-34)
 - unmarried man is worried about the affairs of the Lord
how to please the Lord
 - married man is worried about the affairs of the world
how to please his wife
 - unmarried woman and virgin are worried about the affairs of the Lord
so that they may be holy in body and spirit
 - married woman is worried about the affairs of the world
how to please her husband
 - ii. Conclusion: Paul wants to promote (v. 35)
 - what is right
 - and unhindered devotion to the Lord
 - g) Behaviour regarding virgins: (v. 36-38)
 - i. Case of someone too passionate about his virgin: let him marry
 - ii. Case of someone who can control his desire: let her virgin stay as is
 - iii. Conclusion with virgins:
 - to marry a virgin is good, not to marry is better
 - h) Conclusion (39-40)
 - i. a wife is bound as long as her husband lives
 - ii. she is free to marry a Christian if the husband dies
 - iii. But she will be happier if she remains as is

One can say that Paul's logic doesn't follow strictly the pattern of a scholarly dissertation. He starts with the question presumed from Corinthians about avoiding sexual intercourse for married couples (v. 1), then jumped to the situation of unmarried and widowed people (v. 9) with no hint if this is a question from Corinthians, again he moves to the issue of divorce (v. 10) as if this was a natural segue when discussing marriage, and out of sudden, talks about the question of being circumcised or not, or for a slave to be free or not, and finally, goes back to a question from Corinthians on virgins, which brings us back to the theme of marriage.

But on a high level, Paul's mind is clear with a general principle: stay where you were when God called you. If we look at chapter 7 as a whole, we can find this principle to be the chore of something that is close to an inclusion. It is not a real inclusion as the second part does not respond closely to the first part. But the pattern shows how themes in the beginning recur at the end and pivot around a chore principle.

- Married couples: do your duties to your spouse (1-8)
 - Unmarried and widowed: stay as is (9)
 - Married: don't divorce (10-11)
 - Mixed couples: stay as is if partner consents (12-16)
- General principle: Stay where you were when God called you (17)
 - Virgins: stay as is (26)
 - If married, do not seek to be free (27a)
 - If single, do not seek a wife (27b)
- Relationship with virgins: it is better not to marry them

The overall structure shows that 1 Cor 7: 1-16 is an entity in itself focused on marital relationship, i.e. duties, divorce, mixed couples, and whether to enter in a marital relationship if unmarried or widowed. 1 Cor 7:17 stops this theme by introducing a universal principle that is first applied to the status of those circumcised or not, and to slaves. This entity shows up as well through the vocabulary:

- *γυνή* (woman or wife): 14 times in 1-16, then it disappears until 27-39 (7 times)

- *άνήρ* (man as husband): 13 times in 1-16, then it disappears until 34-39 (3 times)
- *άγαμος* (unmarried): 2 times in 1-16, then recurs only later in 32-34 (2 times)
- *άδελφός* (brother): 4 times in 1-16, then recurs only later in 24-29 (2 times)
- *καλός* (good): 2 times in v. 1-16, then recurs only later in 26-38 (4 times)
- *ίδιος* (own): 4 times in 1-16, then recurs only later in 37 (2 times)
- *έχω* (have): 5 times in 1-16, then recurs only later in 25-40 (7 times)
- *χωρίζω* (to separate): 4 times in 1-16, and nowhere else in 1 Cor
- *άφίημι* (dismiss as in a divorce): 3 times in v. 1-16, and nowhere else in 1 Cor

So, on the level of theological content and vocabulary, section 17-24 introduces a shift, and thus establishes section 1-16 as an entity of its own, with a discussion around marital relationship.

It must be noticed that, despite the miscellaneous situations addressed by Paul, the apostle uses a consistent approach all the time:

- First, he clearly states a principle
- Then he provides a rationale for this principle
- But after he introduces exceptions, usually making room for human debility and frailty
- And he usually tries to talk about men and women as equal partners

2. Textual Critique

The text of 1 Corinthians has been preserved in its entirety on P⁴⁶, a papyrus approximately dated to year 200⁸⁹. A portion can be found on P¹¹ (1:17-20.20-22; 2:9.11.14; parts of chapters 3, 4, 5, 6 and 7) and P¹⁴ (4:12-17 and 4:19-5:3)⁹⁰. P⁴⁶ belongs to the Alexandrian text type, a family of manuscripts that would come from around Alexandria, Egypt and from the Alexandrian Church. This family often presents a text (mainly of the Gospels) that is “terse, shorter, somewhat rough, less harmonized, and generally more difficult”⁹¹. With respect to Paul’s letters, the following uncials or majuscules are the most important manuscripts from this family (date in ascending order).

Sign	Name	Date
P ⁴⁶	Chester Beatty II	Circa 200
B	Codex Vaticanus Graecus 1209	325-350
κ	Codex Sinaiticus	330-360
A	Codex Alexandrinus	Circa 400
C	Codex Ephraemi Rescriptus	5 th century
I	Codex Freerianus	5 th century
P ¹¹	Leningrad	7 th century

However, a version that is more ancient or shorter doesn’t necessarily mean that it is the most authentic: even an old version may have introduced an error or may be depending on a previous version where a scribe missed a word or added a gloss⁹². This is why modern translations used an extensiveness approach, by comparing all the witnesses and determining through analysis what the most likely authentic version is; this is the approach we are adopting here. We also need to take into account other text types, namely the Western text type and the Byzantine one too.

The Western text type is named after the “Western Church”, the Latin Church, which once encompassed the Roman Empire, throughout which Latin was widely understood and spoken, encompassing Western Europe and North Africa. “It is the predominant form of the New Testament text witnessed in the Old Latin and Peshitta translations from the Greek, and also in quotations from some 2nd and 3rd-century Christian writers, including Cyprian, Tertullian and Irenaeus”⁹³. Against the backdrop of the Alexandrian text-type, the Western text-type tends to paraphrase, looking to clarify obscure expressions or to bring them out with greater force and definiteness; its glosses may express a desire to harmonize or complete⁹⁴. No wonder that it often presents longer variants, though not the case for Paul’s letters surprisingly more restrained; hence, “a number of text critics regard it as the

⁸⁹ Date of manuscripts are based on K. Aland, M. Black, C. M. Martini, B. M. Metzger, A. Wikgren, The Greek New Testament. New York – London – Edinburgh – Amsterdam: United Bible Societies, 1977, p. XII-LIII.

⁹⁰ H. Conzelmann, op. cit., p. 1.

⁹¹ Extract from Wikipedia, Textual criticism, New Testament. A typical example of a shorter text is the ending of Mark, 16:9-20 omitted by the Alexandrian tradition.

⁹² A typical example is provided by J. Murphy-O’Connor, op. cit., p. 8, about codex Vaticanus, considered by scholars one of the best text of the New Testament, where the word *Κλαύδιον* (Claudius) is missing in the sentence *διὰ τὸ διατεταχέναι* (Κλαύδιον) (because Claudius had ordered) in Acts 18:2; Claudius is missing as *διὰ* with an infinitive verb requires an accusative subject, otherwise it makes no sense (we would have only: because had ordered, without knowing who had ordered).

⁹³ Wikipedia, Western text-type.

⁹⁴ See Brooke Foss Westcott, Fenton John Anthony Hort. The New Testament In The Original Greek, 1925, p. 550, mentioned by Wikipedia, Western text-type.

most reliable witness to the original⁹⁵. The following uncials or majuscules containing Paul's letters are the most important manuscripts from this family (date in ascending order).

Sign	Name	Date
D ^P	Codex Claromontanus – Paris	6 th century
F ^P	Codex Augiensis – Cambridge	9 th century
G ^P	Codex Boernerianus – Dresden	9 th century

The Byzantine text-type, named after the Byzantine Church and dominant in Constantinople from the 5th century onward, encompasses almost 95% of the manuscripts⁹⁶, and as such it is called *Koinē* text-type, or common, or majority text-type. This very version was used by Erasmus when he published in 1516 the first printed Greek New Testament, and on which were based the German Luther Bible, the translation of the New Testament into English by William Tyndale, the King James Version, the Spanish Reina-Valera translation, the Russian Synodal Bible, and most Reformation-era New Testament translations throughout Western and Central Europe⁹⁷; no wonder it is also called *Textus Receptus*. In the backdrop of Alexandrian text-type, it leans on showing a greater tendency toward smooth and well-formed Greek, and to avoid contradictory or “difficult” issues of exegesis⁹⁸. Because most of the Byzantine text-type manuscripts have been written in the newer minuscule (lower case) style that appeared in 9th and 10th centuries, there are only a few uncials or majuscules containing Paul's letters, one of which is:

Sign	Name	Date
L (020)	Codex Angelicus – Rome	9 th century

Let's now establish the Greek text to be analyzed. First, we need to provide a list of witnesses that will be used in date ascending order and a reference to text-type, i.e. A = Alexandrian; B = Byzantine; W = Western. The text-type is based on what is provided by Wikipedia, except when there is a question mark with respect to Church's Fathers. As to the dates, it is based on those provided by B. M. Metzger and K. Aland⁹⁹. Instead of using the century notation, we prefer to show the years it covers (for instance, 500-599 for the 6th century). For Church's Fathers, the date provided refers to the date of death.

Sign	Name	Date	Type
P ⁴⁶	Chester Beatty II	175-225	A
ir	Irenaeus	202	W
cl	Clement of Alexandria	215	A
tert	Tertullian	220	W
cop	Coptic	250-399	A
or	Origen	254	A
cyp	Cyprian	258	W
dion	Dionysius of Alexandria	265	A
goth	Gothic	300-399	B
B	Codex Vaticanus Graecus 1209	325-350	A
κ	Codex Sinaiticus	330-360	A
syr	Old Syriac and Peshitta	350-699	W
ambst	Ambrosiaster	366 – 384	W
ephr	Ephraem the Syrian	375	W
vg	Vulgate	380-500	W
gr	Gregory of Nyssa	394	B?
A	Codex Alexandrinus	400	A
C	Codex Ephraemi Rescriptus	400-499	A

⁹⁵ Wikipedia, [Western text-type](#).

⁹⁶ Wikipedia, [Textual criticism](#), [New Testament](#).

⁹⁷ Wikipedia, [Textus Receptus](#).

⁹⁸ Wikipedia, [Byzantine text-type](#).

⁹⁹ B. M. Metzger, [The Greek New Testament](#). New York – London – Edinburgh – Amsterdam: United Bible Societies, 1977, p. XII-LIII, and K. Aland, [Novum Testamentum Graece](#). Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelstiftung, 1998, p. 684-710.

I	Codex Freerianus	400-499	A
d	Old Latin – Beae Cantabrigiensis	400-499	W
arm	Armenian	400-499	A
epiph	Epiphanius	403	A?
chr	John Chrysostom	407	B
pel	Pelagius	412	W?
aug	Augustine	430	W?
th	Theodoret	466	B?
D ^p	Codex Claromontanus – Paris	500-599	W
P	Codex Porphyrianus	500-599	A
eth	Ethiopic	500-599	B
cass	Cassidorus	580	W?
p ¹¹	Leningrad	600-699	A
ψ	Codex Athous Lavrensis	700-899	A/B
j-d	John-Damascus	749	B
L	Codex Angelicus – Rome	800-899	B
F ^p	Codex Augiensis – Cambridge	800-899	W
G ^p	Codex Boernerianus – Dresden	800-899	W
K	Codex Mosquensis I	800-899	B
33	Minuscule – Paris	800-899	A
ar	Old Latin – Ardmachanus	800-899	W
pho	Photius	895	B?
1739	Minuscule – Athos	900-999	A
2464	Minuscule – Patmos	900-999	A
945	Minuscule – Athos	1000-1099	B
1175	Minuscule – Patmos	1000-1099	A
181	Minuscule – Rome	1000-1099	W/B
451	Minuscule – Rome	1000-1099	B
436	Minuscule – Vatican	1000-1099	A
1962	Minuscule – Viena	1000-1099	W/B
81	Minuscule – London	1044	A
the	Theophylact	107	B?
104	Minuscule – London	1087	A/B
365	Minuscule – Firenze	1100-1199	B
88	Minuscule – Napoli	1100-1199	W
326	Minuscule – Oxford	1100-1199	A
2127	Minuscule – Palermo	1100-1199	W/B
1241	Minuscule – Sinai	1100-1199	B
330	Minuscule – St Petersburg	1100-1199	B

614	Minuscule – Milan	1200-1299	W/B
6	Minuscule – Paris	1200-1299	A/B
2492	Minuscule – Sinai	1200-1299	W/B
dem	Old Latin – Demidovianus	1200-1299	W
1984	Minuscule – Gotha	1300-1399	W/B
1881	Minuscule – Lesbos	1300-1399	B?
630	Minuscule – Rome	1300-1399	W/B
629	Minuscule – Rome	1300-1399	B
1877	Minuscule – Sinai	1300-1399	W/B
1881	Minuscule – Sinai	1300-1399	W/B
2495	Minuscule – Sinai	1300-1499	W/B
1985	Minuscule -	1561	W/B

Our textual critique will respect this tri-fold principle:

- The shorter text is usually more authentic, as it is more logical that scribes would expand a verse (to provide clarification) than drop words.
- The *lectio difficilior* (more difficult reading) should be preferred, since it is more logical that scribes try clarifying a verse than making it more difficult to understand.
- Manuscripts that are older or more complete like a few renowned Codex of the Alexandrian text-type, should have higher accuracy than later or incomplete manuscripts.

It is understood that this tri-fold principle in itself is not exclusively sufficient and must be supported by a full analysis. In the following variants, this text believed to have been added or modified will be in bold, and that text believed to be missing will be in brackets. These variants presented are based on both Metzger and Aland¹⁰⁰.

Here are the variants:

a. V. 1

- Reading 1: *Περὶ δὲ ὧν ἐγράψατε, καλὸν ἀνθρώπῳ γυναικὸς μὴ ἄπτεσθαι* (Then about things you wrote, (it is) well for a man not to touch a woman).
- Reading 2: *Περὶ δὲ ὧν ἐγράψατε **μοί*** (Then about things you wrote **to me**)

Reading 1 is supported by P⁴⁶, the uncials **℞**, B, and C, and the minuscule 33, 81, 1739, 1881, and 2464, and few Latin versions (the 7th century monacensis (r) and the Stuttgart Vulgate). Besides de Latin version, all other versions belong to the Alexandrian text-type, and so the most reliable and ancient.

Reading 2 is supported by A D F G Ψ, the old Latin (a, b, the Clementine Vulgate), Syriac, Coptic, Ambrosiaster, and Pelagius. Besides Codex Alexandrinus (A), Coptic and Athous Lavrensis (Ψ), all other versions are from the Western text-type.

It is easy to understand that a scribe wanted to be more specific: to whom the letter was written? To me, i.e. Paul. This is a typical example where the Western type-text tries to clarify the text. So **μοί** is considered an addition and does not belong to the original text. One may wonder why a few Alexandrian text-type versions have the same reading? We may guess that, as the western version was circulating as early as the 3rd century (see Irenaeus, Tertullian, Cyprian and the Peshitta), the source of Codex Alexandrinus (5th century) or Athous Lavrensis (8th - 9th century) may have been aware of the western reading and was probably amended accordingly.

b. V. 2

- Reading 1: *διὰ δὲ τὰς πορνείας ἕκαστος τὴν ἑαυτοῦ γυναῖκα ἐχέτω καὶ ἐκάστη τὸν ἴδιον ἄνδρα ἐχέτω* (then because of promiscuities each [man] should have the woman for oneself and each [woman] should have their own husband).
- Reading 2: *διὰ δὲ **τὴν πορνείαν** ἕκαστος τὴν ἑαυτοῦ γυναῖκα ἐχέτω* (then because of **the promiscuity** each [man] should have the woman for oneself).
- Reading 3: *διὰ δὲ τὴν πορνείαν ἕκαστος τὴν ἑαυτοῦ γυναῖκα ἐχέτω ~~καὶ ἐκάστη τὸν ἴδιον ἄνδρα ἐχέτω~~*

¹⁰⁰ B. M. Metzger, op. cit., K. Aland, op. cit.

Reading 1 is supported by almost all manuscripts.

Reading 2 is supported by F, G, old Latin and Syriac. The supportive manuscripts all belong to the Western type-text.

Reading 3 (with missing last part of the sentence) is supported by F, G (both from the 9th century and belonging to Western type-text).

With respect to reading 2, we can easily imagine that a scribe found weird the plural *τάς πορνείας*: usually we talk about sexual immorality in a generic way and with the singular. In fact, some English translations have the singular: situation of sexual immorality (RSV; it was corrected with the plural “cases of sexual immorality” in the NRSV). Moreover, if we look at the 11 occurrences of *πορνεία* in the Pauline epistles (1 Cor 5:1; 6:13.18; 7:2; 2 Cor 12:21; Ga 5:19; Col 3:5; Eph 5:3), we find that this is the only plural occurrence. As it is easier to explain that a scribe would have changed the text from plural to singular in 1 Cor 7:2 to harmonize with Paul usual usage, than the other way around, we must consider the plural (reading 1) as the authentic version (*lectio difficilior*). Again, we have another example of western text-type freedom in order to harmonize with other verses of Paul.

With respect to reading 3, it could be a typical case of *homoioteleuton* or near rhyme, i.e. repetition of endings in words.

2a. Ἐκαστος τὴν ἑαυτοῦ γυναῖκα ἐχέτω

2b. ἐκάστη τὸν ἴδιον ἄνδρα ἐχέτω

We can imagine that a scribe was distracted by the repetition and forgot the ending. This lack of focus could be coupled with missing or sloppy peer review by a supervisor. Because of poor textual support from manuscripts and the pitfall of *homoioteleuton* for a scribe, we must discard this reading.

c. V. 3

- Reading 1: τῆ γυναικὶ ὁ ἀνὴρ τὴν ὀφειλὴν ἀποδιδότω, ὁμοίως δὲ καὶ ἡ γυνὴ τῷ ἀνδρὶ (let the husband render the obligation to the wife, but similarly also let the woman [render the obligation] to the husband).
- Reading 2: τῆ γυναικὶ ὁ ἀνὴρ τὴν ὀφειλομένην εὐνοίαν ἀποδιδότω (let the husband render the **kindness being owed** to the wife).

Reading 1 is supported by the majority of manuscripts: P¹¹ and P⁴⁶, the uncials κ, Α, Β, C, D, F, G, P, Ψ, the minuscule 6, 33, 81, 630, 1175, 1739, 1881, 2464, old Latin and Coptic.

Reading 2 is supported by the Syriac versions.

Up front, we could say that reading 2 is so poorly supported, especially not from the major manuscripts, that it should be discarded right away. Nevertheless, it is worth trying to understand why a scribe would have introduced the word *εὐνοία* (agreement, goodwill, favour, gift, or kindness) coupled with the verb *ὀφείλω* (to owe). Looking closely at Paul's wording (τὴν ὀφειλὴν ἀποδιδότω), *ὀφειλή* literally means debt. The other occurrence in Pauline epistle is in Rom 13: 7: ἀπόδοτε πάντιν **τάς ὀφειλάς**, τῷ τὸν φόρον τὸν φόρον (Render all debts, to whom the tax). How could sexual intercourse between a husband and a wife be on the same level as paying a tax? The scribe would have been uncomfortable with this word, and in his Syriac translation, he took the initiative of softening Paul's rough wording, putting it in line with Western text-type tradition.

d. V. 5a

- Reading 1: μὴ ἀποστερεῖτε ἀλλήλους, εἰ μὴτι ἂν ἐκ συμφώνου πρὸς καιρὸν (Do not deprive one another, unless perhaps potentially from an agreement for a time).
- Reading 2: μὴ ἀποστερεῖτε ἀλλήλους, εἰ μὴτι (**ἂν**) ἐκ συμφώνου πρὸς καιρὸν (Do not deprive one another, unless perhaps **(potentially)** from an agreement for a time).

Reading 1 is supported by almost all manuscripts.

Reading 2 with missing ἂν is supported by two major manuscripts: P⁴⁶ and Codex Vaticanus (B).

Even though reading 2 is supported by only two manuscripts, it cannot be discarded up front, as these manuscripts are notorious (P⁴⁶ is dated around 200, and B around 325-350). We need to make a decision: was ἂν added by all the other manuscripts, or did P⁴⁶ and B dropped ἂν. First, let's say that ἂν is a particle introducing a hypothetical condition in a clause, therefore our translation: potentially. Secondly, this particle is used often throughout the Pauline epistles, namely 21 times, mainly in 1 Corinthians (7 times) and Romans (8 times). So, we need to conclude that it makes perfect sense here. However, the wording εἰ μὴτι ἂν or even εἰ ἂν cannot be found elsewhere. So, this is our *lectio difficilior*. Moreover, there is something redundant with ἂν here. For both εἰ and ἂν introduce a condition, and somehow, they are redundant: we could have only εἰ μὴτι (unless perhaps) and the meaning of the clause wouldn't be really different. So we need to assume that, either the common source of P⁴⁶ and B believed ἂν was redundant, or P⁴⁶ and B believe independently that it was redundant. Anyhow the conclusion is the same: it makes more sense that a redundant particle was dropped, than that it was added. So ἂν was probably part of the authentic text, as reading 1 testifies.

e. V. 5b

- Reading 1: *ἵνα σχολάσητε τῇ προσευχῇ* (in order to devote yourself to prayer).
- Reading 2: *ἵνα σχολάσητε τῇ νηστείᾳ καὶ τῇ προσευχῇ* (in order to devote yourself to **fasting and** to prayer).
- Reading 3: *ἵνα σχολάσητε τῇ προσευχῇ καὶ τῇ νηστείᾳ* (in order to devote yourself to prayer **and fasting**).

Reading 1 is supported by P¹¹ and P⁴⁶, the uncials **N*** (scribe's first hand), A, B, C, D, F, G, P, and Ψ, the minuscule 6, 33, 81, 104, 1175, 1739, 1881, and 2464, Old Latin, Vulgate, Coptic, Armenian, Ethiopic, Cyprian, Dionysius, Ambrosiaster, and Epiphanius of Constantia. These manuscripts belong mainly to the Alexandrian text-type, with a few of the Western and Byzantine text-types. So, overall the support is strong, especially from the Codex ones.

Reading 2 is supported by uncials ²N (second scribe's correction), K, L, minuscule 88, 326, 436, 614, 1241, 1984, 1985, 2127, 2492, 2495, the Byzantine Lectionaries, a few Syriac translations, Gothic, Ephraem, Chrysostom, and Theodoret. So we have a mix of Alexandrian text-type (436, 326, ²N), Byzantine text-type (K, L, 1241, Byzantine Lectionaries, Gothic, and Chrysostom), Western Text-type (Syriac, Ephraem, Theodoret), and a hybrid group of both Western and Byzantine text-types (614, 1984, 1985, 2127, 2492, 2495). Therefore, support for it is quite impressive.

Reading 3 is supported by minuscule 330 and 451, and as well by John-Damascus, all part of the Byzantine text-type.

So a decision is to be made as to whether *τῇ νηστείᾳ καὶ* was added or dropped from the original text. If we go back to our basic textual critique principle, namely that the shorter text is usually more authentic and manuscripts that are older or more complete, like a few renowned Codex of the Alexandrian text-type, should be preferred, then we should make the decision that *τῇ νηστείᾳ καὶ* is an addition. Should it be the case, how can we explain this addition, which would date back to the late 4th century at the earliest with ²N, Syriac translations, Gothic, Ephraem and Chrysostom¹⁰¹?

Firstly, we need to assume that the purpose of an addition is to clarify something. What needs to be clarified here? One could be puzzled by the fact that a Christian has to leave home in order to dedicate time for prayer. Can we not pray everywhere and all the time? Why should we take time off to pray? There is an ambiguity here, which a scribe took the initiative to clarify by explaining that Paul was referring to a kind of retreat for a period of time, involving not only prayer, but fasting as well; we will further discuss this in our analysis of verse 5.

Secondly, can we be more specific about where the addition was made? We could formulate a hypothesis here, even though it might be difficult to corroborate: there is a common thread uniting ²N, Syriac translations, Ephraem, and Chrysostom: the influence of Antioch. Let's start with the Peshitta where the Syriac translation of *τῇ νηστείᾳ καὶ* is found. Peshitta means "common" or "simple" version. Similar to the Vulgate with the old Latin versions, the Peshitta (may be from the early 6th century) represented a newer version of existing old Syriac texts that can be dated back as early as the end of the 2nd century¹⁰². Whether this work was undertaken in Antioch or not, it remains that this city, which had a large population of Jewish origin, became the centre of Syriac culture and the seat of one of the five original patriarchates, along with Constantinople, Jerusalem, Alexandria, and Rome. To this Syriac culture belongs Ephraem the Syrian, a deacon and a prolific Syriac-language hymnographer and theologian of the 4th century. We also have to include John Chrysostom in this culture, for he was born in Antioch, was ordained there as a deacon in 381, and then as a priest in 386. What was common to these ones is the reading: *τῇ νηστείᾳ καὶ*.

But what about ²N, located in Egypt? Interestingly, Agnes Smith Lewis and her sister Margaret Dunlop Gibson discovered in 1892 at Saint Catherine's Monastery (the same location in Egypt as the Codex Sinaiticus (**N**)) a palimpsest now called Syriac Sinaiticus or Sinaitic Palimpsest, contained in the scratched version (a palimpsest is a writing material on which the original writing has been removed to make room for later writing but of which traces remain) of the four gospels in Syriac¹⁰³. What does this say? The Syriac influence had reached Egypt, and the Syriac translation of the Bible was known. So why was 1 Cor 7:5 in **N** eventually corrected with the addition of *τῇ νηστείᾳ καὶ*? Could this have been performed by a second scribe or a supervisor who knew the Syriac reading? Nevertheless, the Antioch and Syriac influence is highly probable.

As to the other witnesses, they appeared later on and it is almost impossible to determine how the Syriac reading has permeated the Byzantine text-type to which belong the uncials K and L, minuscule 1241, and the Byzantine Lectionaries. Nonetheless, they pertain to the same geographical area.

¹⁰¹ Was it a correction to **N** contemporary to the original document? According [Wikipedia](#), Tischendorf believed that five correctors amended portions of the document, and they worked in the 6th and 7th centuries.

¹⁰² [Wikipedia](#), *Peshitta*.

¹⁰³ [Wikipedia](#), Syriac Sinaiticus.

As to reading 3, we could ask the question: why inverting the order fasting-prayer with prayer-fasting. There are likely two explanations: an oversight from a scribe, or a conscious initiative to give priority to prayer, as it was probably felt that prayer was more important than fasting.

f. V. 5c

- Reading 1: *καὶ πάλιν ἐπὶ τὸ αὐτὸ ἦτε* (and again be in the same place).
- Reading 2: *καὶ πάλιν ἐπὶ τὸ αὐτὸ συνέρχασθε* (and again **come together** in the same place).
- Reading 3: *καὶ πάλιν ἐπὶ τὸ αὐτὸ συνέρχησθε* (and again **come together** in the same place).

Reading 1 is supported by P¹¹, the uncials κ, Α, Β, C, D, F, and G, the minuscule 33, 81, 365, 630, 1175, 1739, 1881, and 2464. So these manuscripts are the most important ones and the majority of which belongs to the Alexandrian text-type (κ, Α, Β, C, 33, 1175, 1739, 1881, and 2464).

Reading 2 is supported by P⁴⁶, P, 614. It should be noted that both P⁴⁶ and Codex Porphyrianus (P) belong to the Alexandrian text-type and P⁴⁶ is one of our oldest witnesses (believed to be around 175-225). This may be a typical example where age alone cannot decide about authenticity.

Reading 3 is supported by the uncial Ψ, most of the old Latin and Syriac translations, Cyprian of Carthage, and Ambrosiaster. These witnesses belong to the Western text-type, except Ψ that is a mix, which value is not on the same level for our discussion, since old Latin and Syriac are translations, Ambrosiaster is the name given to the writer of a commentary on Paul's epistles based on the old Latin, and Cyprian is a Latin writer using the Latin version of the Bible.

What is at stake here? On the one hand, we have ἦτε, the present subjunctive 2nd person plural of the verb: to be (εἶμι); on the other hand, we have συνέρχασθε, the present imperative 2nd person plural passive/middle voice of the verb: to come together (συνέρχομαι). So, this means that on one side, there is the most basic verb, and on the other side, a more "sophisticated" verb. One could say that the simpler term should be more authentic, and we could understand that a scribe would have "enhanced" the sentence with a nicer and more precise term. In fact, these arguments come from 1 Corinthians itself, namely:

- 1 Cor 11:20 (in bold similarities with our text): **Συνερχομένων οὖν ὑμῶν ἐπὶ τὸ αὐτὸ οὐκ ἔστιν κυριακὸν δεῖπνον φαγεῖν** (Therefore when you, **coming together in the same place**, it is not to eat the Lord's supper);
- 1 Cor 14:23: **Ἐάν οὖν συνέλθῃ ἡ ἐκκλησία ὅλη ἐπὶ τὸ αὐτὸ καὶ πάντες λαλῶσιν γλώσσαις** (Therefore if potentially the whole church **would come together in the same place** and all would speak with tongues)

συνέρχομαι in 1 Corinthians is associated with the church's gathering, either for the Eucharist (11:17-18.20.33-34), or for the prayer (14:23.26). Most likely, the scribe knew it, and his objective would have been two-fold. First, bringing clarity to the rationale for a husband and a wife to urgently come back together; not so much for making love as soon as possible to keep temptation at bay, but to join again as soon as the church is gathering. Second, harmonizing this verse with these other two verses where Paul uses ἐπὶ τὸ αὐτὸ, and where he introduces this expression with συνέρχομαι. In conclusion, reading 2 is a typical case of clarification and harmonization.

What about reading 3? The only difference between reading 2 and 3 is that συνέρχομαι has the imperative tense in reading 2 but the subjunctive tense in reading 3, but the meaning is the same. The Greek text we are assuming in reading 3 is based on a reconstruction, as it is based on syriac and latin versions, and so cannot really be used to determine if συνέρχομαι was an imperative or a subjunctive, whereas, a translation is mainly used to confirm a reading, not to establish it. Therefore, we are left with only the Codex Athous Lavrensis, a 8th or 9th century Greek text as our main witness. What is there to conclude? We have already established that συνέρχομαι does not pertain to the authentic text. Thus, only three options could be contemplated with respect to συνέρχησθε: first, a scribe independently thought the same thing as the scribe at the source of P⁴⁶, but wrote it in his own way; second, a scribe familiar with the P⁴⁶ tradition, but did not think that the imperative was appropriate and modified it for the subjunctive; third, a scribe would have overlooked it, knowing that the meaning stays the same. Therefore, we cannot truly decide.

g. V. 5d

- Reading 1: *ἵνα μὴ πειράξῃ ὑμᾶς ὁ σατανᾶς διὰ τὴν ἀκρασίαν ὑμῶν* (in order that Satan might not tempt you because of the debility of yours).
- Reading 2: *ἵνα μὴ πειράξῃ ὑμᾶς ὁ σατανᾶς διὰ τὴν ἀκρασίαν (ὑμῶν)* (in order that Satan might not tempt you because of the debility **(of yours)**).

Reading 1 is supported by all manuscripts except B.

Reading 2 is supported by the Codex Vaticanus (B).

There is no reason to imagine that all the written traditions would have added ὑμῶν, believing somehow that τὴν ἀκρασίαν (the debility) needed clarification so that everyone would know that Paul was referring to the debility of Corinthians (of you). The most obvious explanation of the missing ὑμῶν is to imagine that the Codex Vaticanus scribe just had an oversight,

skipping the ending of the sentence, especially due to the fact that *ὁμῶν* is not really mandatory: it is self-evident that Paul is referring to the Corinthians.

h. V. 7a

- Reading 1: *θέλω δὲ πάντας ἀνθρώπους εἶναι ὡς καὶ ἐμαυτὸν* (Then I would wish that all men be also like myself).
- Reading 2: *θέλω γάρ πάντας ἀνθρώπους εἶναι ὡς καὶ ἐμαυτὸν* (**Indeed** I would wish that all men be also like myself).

Reading 1 is supported by P⁴⁶, uncials κ* (scribe's first hand), A, C, D* (scribe's firsthand), and G, minuscule 33, 81, 181, 326, 629, 1877, 1962, and 1985, most of old Latin, Vulgate Wordsworth-White, Coptic Bohairic, Gothic, Cyprian, Ambrosiaster, and John-Damascus. It is a mix of Alexandrian type (P⁴⁶, κ*, A, C, 33, 81, 326, Coptic Bohairic), Byzantine type (629, Gothic, John-Damascus), Western type (D*, G, Old Latin, Vulgate Wordsworth-White, Cyprian, Ambrosiaster), and hybrid type (mix of Western and Byzantine)(181, 1877, 1962, 1985).

Reading 2 is supported by ²κ (second scribe's correction), B, D² (second scribe's correction), K, P, Ψ, 88, 104, 330, 436, 451, 614, 630, 1241, 1739, 1881, 1984, 2127, 2492, 2495, Byzantine Lectionaries, Vulgate Clementine, Peshitta, Coptic Sahidic, Armenian, Ethiopic, and Cyprian. All text-types are represented: Alexandrian (²κ, B, P, 436, 1739, 1881, Coptic, and Armenian), Byzantine (K, 330, 451, 1241, Byzantine Lectionaries, Ethiopic), Western (Vulgate Clementine, Peshitta and Cyprian), hybrid, i.e. either a mix of Alexandrian and Byzantine (Ψ, 104), either a mix of Western and Byzantine (614, 630, 1984, 2127, 2492, 2495). What is worth mentioning is that this variant is supported by two major ancient manuscripts: the Sinaiticus corrected and the Vaticanus, dated back to mid 4th century. So, which is the authentic reading, *δέ* (then) or *γάρ* (indeed)? As both readings are well supported, our discussion cannot only be based on manuscripts.

Both *δέ* and *γάρ* have the same role of uniting what precedes with what follows, and both are used very often in the Pauline epistles: *δέ* (633 times overall, 209 times in 1 Cor), *γάρ* (454 times overall, 104 times in 1 Cor). Even though they are playing the role of a conjunction, they are not doing it in the same way. On the one hand, *δέ* couples sentences in a very loose way. In English it would look like someone telling a story and saying: "Then... then... then... then...". The role of "then" is only to explain what is about to be said follows in a sequential but loose manner on what has just been said. In 1 Corinthians 7:1-16, *δέ* is used 15 times, almost in every verse. On the other hand, the role of *γάρ* is more specific: it introduces a causal relationship, an explanation: I ate a lot, for (or indeed) I was hungry. In 1 Corinthians 7:1-16 *γάρ* is used only once, in verse 9, when Paul says: But if they do not have self-control, let them marry, for (*γάρ*) better it is to marry than to burn they should marry.

So, the decision we need to make is on: Did a scribe replace *δέ* with *γάρ*, or the other way around, and why? On the one hand, if we assume that *γάρ* is the authentic reading and a scribe took the initiative to replace it with *δέ*, then the only explanation that comes to mind is a desire to align the sentence with all the other *δέ* of our text. But by doing so, he removed the causal relationship with what precedes and created a more neutral sentence. Such an action goes against one facet of our tri-fold principle, the scribes' tendency to bring more clarity to a text. On the other hand, if we assume that *δέ* is the authentic reading and a scribe took the initiative to replace it with *γάρ*, then we can understand his goal: he wants to explain why Paul talks of marital relationship or sexual intercourse as a permission or concession; hence, he would like people to stay single as he is; *γάρ* introduces a causal relationship between v. 6 and v. 7. So we need to conclude that *δέ* is the authentic reading and a scribe, early in the copyists' tradition, wanted to bring more clarity to Paul's thought and replaced the particle *δέ* with the conjunction *γάρ*.

i. V. 7c

- Reading 1: *ὁ μὲν οὕτως, ὁ δὲ οὕτως* (on the one hand like this, on the other hand like that).
- Reading 2: *ὅς μὲν οὕτως, ὃς δὲ οὕτως* (**who** indeed like this, then **who** like that).

Reading 1 is supported by κ* (scribe's firsthand), A, B, C, D, F, G, P, 6, 33, 81, 630, 1739, 1881, 2464, Clement of Alexandria. Most of these witnesses belong to the Alexandrian text-type (κ*, A, B, C, P, 6, 33, 81, 1739, 1881, 2464, Clement of Alexandria), the others to the Western text-type.

Reading 2 is supported by P⁴⁶, ²κ. Both are from the Alexandrian text-type. What is noteworthy, these two witnesses are important and ancient. But as we have seen previously, seniority doesn't prevent variants: ²κ probably introduced *νηστειᾶ* (v. 5: fasting) and replaced *δέ* with *γάρ* (v. 7), possibly due to contact with other manuscripts. We have seen previously as well that P⁴⁶ dropped *ἄν* (v. 5), and replaced *ἦτε* with *συνέρχεσθε* (v. 5).

First, let's look closely at both *ὁ* and *ὃς*. *ὁ* (the) is a definite article, masculine nominative singular, used here as a noun (one). It is the most common word of the whole New Testament. Usage of the article as a noun is not frequent in 1 Corinthians, and in fact as a masculine nominative singular, our verse is unique. On the other hand, *ὃς* is a relative pronoun found 15 times in all cases and gender in 1 Corinthians. But we need to pinpoint that 1 Corinthians 11:21 provides an example of *ὃς* repeated twice as in our variant:

- *ἕκαστος γὰρ τὸ ἴδιον δεῖπνον προλαμβάνει ἐν τῷ φαγεῖν, καὶ ὃς μὲν πεινᾷ ὃς δὲ μεθύει* (For each takes first his own support to eat, and indeed **one who** is hungry, then **one who** is drunken).

And the latter verse refers to the Eucharist and was referred to earlier by P⁴⁶ in adding *συνέρχεσθε* at v. 5. This seems a typical example of grammatical harmonization. What to conclude? It makes no sense that a scribe would have replaced the double *ὄς* already present in 1 Corinthians with a double *ὁ* that would have been unique. For what purpose? If, on the other hand, we consider *ὁ* as the authentic reading, then we can understand that the same scribe who took the initiative of adding *συνέρχεσθε* at v. 5, based on 1 Cor 11:20, moved forward with grammatical harmonization using the following verse (1 Cor 11:21) and discarded *ὁ* for *ὄς*. This is what P⁴⁶ reflects. As to ²κ, we need again to consider the fact that Codex Sinaiticus tends to be amended afterwards by knowledge of variants circulating in the area.

j. V. 9

- Reading 1: *κρεῖττον γάρ ἐστιν γαμῆσαι ἢ πυροῦσθαι* (for it is better to have married than burn).
- Reading 2: *κρεῖττον γάρ ἐστιν γαμεῖν ἢ πυροῦσθαι* (for it is better to **marry** than burn).

Reading 1 is supported by P⁴⁶, uncials ²κ (second scribe's correction), B, C², D, F, G, Ψ, and Epiphanius of Constantia. The majority of the witnesses belong to the Alexandrian text-type (P⁴⁶, ²κ, B, C², Ψ, and Epiphanius of Constantia), and the remaining to the Western text-type. Overall, the manuscripts support is of high level with the major Papyrus and Codex.

Reading 2 is supported by uncials κ* (scribe's firsthand), A, C*, and P, minuscule 33, 81, 945, and 2495. The majority of witnesses are Alexandrian text-type (κ*, A, C*, P, 33, 81), except for Byzantine text-type (945, 2495).

So, the supportive witnesses for both readings are not so bad. How to decide between *γαμῆσαι* and *γαμεῖν* as the authentic reading? Let's examine each verb.

γαμῆσαι is the active aorist infinitive of the verb *γαμέω* (marry), while *γαμεῖν* is the active present infinitive of this verb. So the only difference between the two verbs is that the first has the aorist tense, i.e. a past and completed action, while the second has the present tense, i.e. a current action. This is not a big deal except if we look at what follows: *πυροῦσθαι* is the passive/middle voice present infinitive of the verb *πυρόω* (burn). Here is the issue: if we look together at *γαμῆσαι* and *πυροῦσθαι*, why is the first verb an aorist, and the second a present? So this is the *lectio difficilior*. It seems that there is a scribe that raised the same issue and decided to streamline the sentence by having only present tenses, and so discarded *γαμῆσαι* for *γαμεῖν*. Somehow, this change was made in the Alexandrian text-type area.

k. V. 10b

- Reading 1: *γυναῖκα ἀπὸ ἀνδρὸς μὴ χωρισθῆναι* (wife from husband not to have been separated).
- Reading 2: *γυναῖκα ἀπὸ ἀνδρὸς μὴ χωριζέσθω* (wife from husband **let not be separated**)
- Reading 3: *γυναῖκα ἀπὸ ἀνδρὸς μὴ χωρίζεσθαι* (wife from husband not to be separated)

Reading 1 is supported by P¹¹, uncials κ, A, B, C, Ψ, and also by Clement of Alexandria and Epiphanius of Constantia; all of which belong to Alexandrian text-type.

Reading 2 is only supported by P⁴⁶ and minuscule 614 (13th century).

Reading 3 is supported by A, D, F, G, 1881, 2495. Besides Codex Alexandrinus, all the other witnesses that belong to the Western text-type are a bit late.

So, with respect to reading 1 and 2, we need to decide between *χωρισθῆναι* and *χωριζέσθω*. *χωρισθῆναι* is the passive/middle voice of the aorist infinitive of the verb *χωρίζω* (separate), while *χωριζέσθω* is the passive/middle voice of the present imperative of the verb *χωρίζω* (separate). On the one hand, we have an infinitive; and on the other hand, an imperative. An infinitive requires an introductory clause, i.e. you cannot say only "not to separate", but you need to say "I ask you not to separate". Hence, the sentence *γυναῖκα ἀπὸ ἀνδρὸς μὴ χωρισθῆναι* is puzzling; we have tried to translate this enigma with "wife from husband not to be separated", without any introductory clause. This is the *lectio difficilior*. The scribe behind P⁴⁶ tradition likely felt scratchy and took the initiative of bringing grammatical improvement by changing the infinitive with an imperative: let not a wife be separated from a husband. We could conclude that the authentic reading is *χωρισθῆναι* (infinitive), and the effort of that scribe to introduce grammatical improvement makes more sense than his introducing a scrappy infinitive.

What about reading 3? We have the same verb: *χωρίζω*. In reading 1 it is in aorist infinitive form, in reading 2 in present imperative form, and in reading 3 it is in present infinitive form. We just said that the aorist infinitive form is probably the reading to be preferred. But why a scribe would have change it to the present infinitive? Let's look at the beginning of the verse: *Τοῖς δὲ γεγαμηκόσιν παραγγέλλω, οὐκ ἐγὼ ἀλλ' ὁ κύριος* (Then to those having married I send this message, not me but the Lord). Noticeably, this clause is introduced by *παραγγέλλω* (I send this message), a verb in the present tense. The

aorist infinitive becomes the *lectio difficilior*; a scribe would have changed it to a present infinitive for a grammatical reason. Hence, our previous conclusion stands¹⁰⁴.

I. V. 13a

- Reading 1: *καὶ γυνὴ εἴ τις ἔχει ἄνδρα ἄπιστον* (and a wife if any has a husband unbeliever).
- Reading 2: *καὶ γυνὴ ἧτις ἔχει ἄνδρα ἄπιστον* (and a wife **who** has a husband unbeliever).

Reading 1 is supported by P⁴⁶, uncials κ, D* (scribe's firsthand), F, G, P, minuscule 2495, Old Latin, Vulgate, Coptic Sahidic. So witnesses are split between Alexandrian text-type (P⁴⁶, κ, P, Coptic) and Western text-type (D*, F, G, 2495, Old Latin, Vulgate).

Reading 2 is supported by the Alexandrian text-type uncials A and B, by D² (Western text-type), Byzantine text-type uncials K and Ψ, and several Byzantine text-type minuscule. On the basis of manuscripts only, this is a tough call, since both readings have support from great and old manuscripts, all from Alexandrian text-type, P⁴⁶, κ for εἴ τις; and A and B for ἧτις.

Beginning with εἴ τις, we have here εἴ (if), a conjunction, followed by τις (certain / any), an indefinite pronoun. In 1 Corinthians alone, it is found 16 times. Let's give a few examples:

- 3:17 *εἴ τις τὸν ναὸν τοῦ θεοῦ φθειρεῖ* (if any destroys the temple of God)
- 3:18 *εἴ τις δοκεῖ σοφὸς εἶναι* (if any seems to be wise)
- 7:12 *εἴ τις ἀδελφὸς γυναῖκα ἔχει ἄπιστον* (if any brother has a wife unbeliever)
- 8:2 *εἴ τις δοκεῖ ἔγνωκέναι τι* (if any seems to have known something)
- 10:27 *εἴ τις καλεῖ ὑμᾶς τῶν ἀπίστων* (if any invites you among the unbelievers)
- 11:16 *εἰ δέ τις δοκεῖ φιλόνηκος εἶναι* (if any seems to be contentious)
- 11:34 *εἴ τις πεινᾷ, ἐν οἴκῳ ἐσθιέτω* (if any is hungry, at home let him eat)
- 14:38 *εἰ δέ τις ἀγνοεῖ, ἀγνοεῖται* (then if any is ignorant, let him be ignorant)
- 16:22 *εἴ τις οὐ φιλεῖ τὸν κύριον* (if any does not love the Lord)

These examples show the expression εἴ τις followed by a verb in the present tense, exactly what we have in v. 13. Moreover, in its preceding v. 12, we have εἴ τις in reference to an unbeliever, exactly what we have in v. 13. And we can go further with a parallel, similarities here underscored:

- v. 12 *εἴ τις ἀδελφὸς γυναῖκα ἔχει ἄπιστον*
- v. 13 *καὶ γυνὴ εἴ τις ἔχει ἄνδρα ἄπιστον*

So, support for εἴ τις being the authentic reading is really strong.

However, ἧτις is the feminine nominative singular form of the relative pronoun ὅστις (who/which/that). In 1 Corinthians, we can only find two cases: 3:17 (*ὁ γὰρ ναὸς τοῦ θεοῦ ἅγιός ἐστιν, οἳτινές ἐστε ὑμεῖς*: for the temple of God is holy, which yourselves are), and 5:1 (*καὶ τοιαύτη πορνεία ἧτις οὐδὲ ἐν τοῖς ἔθνεσιν*: and such promiscuity which not even among pagans). What is it to conclude? Paul's use of ἧτις is infrequent and given the fact of a parallel between v. 12 and 13, εἴ τις should be considered the authentic reading. However, ἧτις is the *lectio difficilior*. So, what is the more probable, that a scribe changed the expected εἴ τις to the unexpected ἧτις, or the other way around? It seems more probable that a scribe, seeing the unexpected ἧτις, would have wanted to harmonize it with v. 12, and so changed it to the frequently used εἴ τις. We have seen earlier (v. 5 and 7) that P⁴⁶'s tradition does grammatical modifications; therefore, we need to conclude that ἧτις, alternately to Metzger and Aland, is the authentic reading¹⁰⁵.

m. V. 13b

- Reading 1: *καὶ οὗτος συνευδοκεῖ οἰκεῖν μετ' αὐτῆς* (and this one he consents to dwell with her).
- Reading 2: *καὶ οὗτος (συν)ευδοκεῖ οἰκεῖν μετ' αὐτῆς* (and this one he is well pleased to dwell with her).
- Reading 3: *καὶ αὐτός συνευδοκεῖ οἰκεῖν μετ' αὐτῆς* (and **him** he consents to dwell with her).

Reading 1 is supported by all manuscripts, except by those supporting the reading 2.

Reading 2 with *ευδοκεῖ*, instead of *συνευδοκεῖ*, is supported by P⁴⁶, uncial B, and minuscule 81, 181* (scribe's first hand), 2464. The support of P⁴⁶, B, two heavyweight witnesses, is worth mentioning¹⁰⁶.

Reading 3 is supported by uncials D², Ψ, and majority of Syriac.

¹⁰⁴ J. Murphy-O'Connor, *The Divorced Woman in 1 Cor 7:10-11*, *JournBibLit*, 100 (1981)601.

¹⁰⁵ H. Conzelmann, *op. cit.*, p. 119, note 7: "The variant reading εἴ τις in P⁴⁶, κ, D*, G, is an assimilation to v. 12. ἧτις is to be preferred also because of the word order On the anacoluthon which results in this case, Blass-Debrunner #469: 'Another clause in which the relative cannot take the same form is sometimes joined to a relative clause by a coordinating particle (καί, etc.)'".

¹⁰⁶ Metzger, *op. cit.*, doesn't mention it, probably because the current reading is obvious.

So which reading is authentic, *συνευδοκεῖ* or *ευδοκεῖ*? First, let's take the time to look at each word in the Pauline epistles¹⁰⁷, starting with *ευδοκεῖ*, a verb formed by combining the adverb *εὖ* (well) and the verb *δοκέω* (to suppose or expect or imagine or seem or think), and which means: to think well, to think best, be well pleased, take delight in. Overall, there is an element of subjectivity in the way someone looks at something or thinks about it, and is conveyed by this verb. It is found 11 times in Pauline corpus.

- Four times, the subject is God: He was pleased to save those believing through the foolishness of the proclamation (1 Cor 1:21); not all pleased to God in the Exodus period (1 Cor 10:5); God was pleased in selecting Paul from his mother's womb (Ga 1:15); in Christ all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell (Col 1:19).
- Four times, the subject is Paul himself: He is rather pleased to be away from his body and to be at home with the Lord (2 Cor 5:8); he takes pleasure in weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities for the sake of Christ (2 Cor 12:10); he is pleased to have shared with the Thessalonians the Gospel of God (1 Thess 2:8); he thought it best to be left in Athens (1 Thess 3:1).
- Two times, the subjects are Christians in Macedonia and Achaia who were pleased to make a contribution for the poor (Rom 15:26-27).
- Finally, one time the subject refers to all who have not believed the truth but took pleasure in unrighteousness (Gal 1:15).

So, if *ευδοκεῖ* is the authentic reading and Paul is saying: "if a wife has a husband who is an unbeliever and he is pleased to (or take delight in living) live with her, she should not divorce", then we have something surprising under Paul's pen. For Paul is usually careful, especially in 1 Corinthians, in considering men and women as equal beings. But here he would have said that a divorce should not take place if the man is pleased with her wife; this would be close to Judaism approach on divorce where dismissing a wife by a man depends on how much he is still pleased with her¹⁰⁸. On the vocabulary level, the verb becomes suspicious.

Let's look now at *συνευδοκεῖ*. We know this word is a combination of the preposition *συν* (with, together with, including) and *εὐδοκέω* we have just seen. It means: to concur with, to give one's consent, to join in approving¹⁰⁹. In his epistles, this verb is used three times, two times in our text under analysis, and one time in Romans 15, 32: "They know God's decree, that those who practice such things deserve to die — yet they not only do them but even approve (*συνευδοκεῖ*) others who practice them". So when we talk in terms of giving consent or approving, we are almost in a legal world and conscious decision making. So, on the vocabulary level, we can understand that Paul is stressing the fact that there should be a conscious decision from an unbeliever to stay with his Christian wife. But there is more.

In talking about divorce, Paul is careful in dealing with men and women in the same way and in a fairly fashion, and so use the same construction for both.

v. 12 καὶ αὕτη <u>συνευδοκεῖ</u> οἰκεῖν μετ' αὐτοῦ, μὴ ἀφιέτω αὐτήν	v. 13 καὶ οὗτος <u>συνευδοκεῖ</u> οἰκεῖν μετ' αὐτῆς, μὴ ἀφιέτω τὸν ἄνδρα
v. 12 and her she <u>consents</u> to dwell with him, he should not dismiss her.	v. 13 and this one he <u>consents</u> to dwell with her, she should not dismiss the husband

Would the authentic reading be *ευδοκεῖ*, then the parallel would be wicked, and we would have a hard time explaining why Paul didn't keep the same verb. So it is high probable that *συνευδοκεῖ* was the verb used by Paul.

But then how to explain that *ευδοκεῖ* was found in P⁴⁶ and the Codex Vaticanus? P⁴⁶ is a very valuable manuscript because of its seniority, but we have to recognize that sometimes its reading is questionable: in our analysis, on top of what we have just said, we have already rejected in 5a its omission of *ἄν*, in 5c its replacement of *ἦτε* with *συνέρχασθε*, in 7c its replacement of *ὁ* with *ὅς*, in 10b its replacement of *χωρισθῆναι* with *χωριζέσθω*, and later on in v. 15c we will need to reject its replacement of *ὕμᾱς* with *ἡμᾱς*. There seems to be with P⁴⁶'s scribe or the source he is depending on some kind of freedom when copying a manuscript. On the other hand, we find sometimes in the Codex Vaticanus omissions, for instance *ἄν* in 5a, *ὕμῶν* in 5d, *συν* with *ευδοκεῖ* in v. 13b, as if this was an oversight, or minor vocabulary changes like *γάρ* instead of *δέ* in 7a, or *ἡμᾶς* instead of *ὕμᾱς* in v. 15c. But what is striking is the fact that three times in our text under analysis P⁴⁶ and Codex Vaticanus are witnessing the same variants: 5a (*ἄν*), v. 13b (*ευδοκεῖ*) and 15c (*ἡμᾶς*). We know that they both belong to the Alexandrian text-type. But we need to recognize that somehow, they had access to similar sources¹¹⁰.

As to reading 3, it is poorly supported: Syriac are translations, and D (6th century) and Ψ (8th or 9th century) are late uncials. Moreover, if we ask the question: what is more probable, i.e. a change by a scribe from *αὐτός* to *οὗτος*, or the other way around? We have to conclude that it is more probable that a scribe changed *οὗτος* to *αὐτός* because we have in the previous verse *αὕτη*: he wanted to harmonize v. 13 with v. 12, so to have: *αὕτη συνευδοκεῖ* (12) and *αὐτός συνευδοκεῖ* (13), an exact parallel. Thus, *οὗτος* is the *lectio difficilior* and should be preferred.

¹⁰⁷ Under Pauline epistles, we include all the epistles, even those whose Pauline authorship is questioned by several exegetes. Even if we grant the fact that Paul is not the author, we have to recognize that Paul's disciples must have kept the same trend of thought.

¹⁰⁸ See John P. Meier, *A Marginal Jew - Rethinking the Historical Jesus*, Doubleday (The Anchor Bible Reference Library), New York, v. 4: *Law and Love*. Yale University, 2009, p. 74-181.

¹⁰⁹ See Henry George Liddell, Robert Scott, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, on [Perseus](#) database and [Kata Biblon Lexicon of the Greek New Testament](#) Web site.

¹¹⁰ It is possible that a few sources were available when a scribe was copying his manuscript.

n. V. 13c

- Reading 1: *μὴ ἀφιέτω τὸν ἄνδρα* (she should not dismiss the husband)
- Reading 2: *μὴ ἀφιέτω τὸν αὐτόν* (she should not dismiss **him**).

Reading 1 is supported by P¹¹, P⁴⁶, uncials κ* (scribe's first hand), A, B, C, D, F, G, minuscule 33, 81, 1175, 1739, 1881, 2464, several old Latin, and several Syriac. This type of support is overwhelming.

Reading 2 is support by Ψ, Syriac Harclean, and Tertullian.

Reading 2 has poor support, and above all, it is a clear effort to harmonize with v. 12 *μὴ ἀφιέτω αὐτήν* (he should not dismiss her), to obtain an exact parallel here in v. 13: *μὴ ἀφιέτω τὸν αὐτόν* (she should not dismiss him). Thus *τὸν ἄνδρα* is the *lectio difficilior* and should be preferred.

o. V. 14a

- Reading 1: *ἡγίασται γὰρ ὁ ἀνὴρ ὁ ἄπιστος ἐν τῇ γυναικί* (For the husband the unbeliever has been made holy through the wife).
- Reading 2: *ἡγίασται γὰρ ὁ ἀνὴρ ὁ ἄπιστος ἐν τῇ γυναικί τῇ πιστῇ* (For the husband the unbeliever has been made holy through the wife **the faithful**).

Reading 1 is supported by P⁴⁶, uncials κ* (scribe's firsthand), A, B, C, D* (scribe's firsthand), G, P, Ψ, minuscule 33, 181, 1739, 1877, 1962, several old Latin, Coptic, and Augustine.

Reading 2 is supported by D, F, G, 629, Old Latin, Peshitta. Except for minuscule 629, all supporting manuscripts belong to the Western text-type.

As a textual critique tenet, we have said that a shorter text is usually more authentic, since a scribe may expand a text to provide clarification, meaning that *τῇ πιστῇ* would be an addition made by a scribe under this tenet; this needs some confirmation.

Firstly, let us look at the expression “*τῇ γυναικί τῇ πιστῇ*”. *Πιστῇ* is the adjective *πιστός* (faithful, trustworthy), used as a noun, placed here as an apposition to *γυναικί* and declined similarly, i.e. dative, feminine, singular.

Secondly, in itself, *πιστός* is a frequent word in the Pauline corpus (33 times): of which, used 12 times to describe God or the Word (typically 1 Cor 1:9: *πιστὸς ὁ θεός*, God is faithful), and 4 times to describe human behaviour (typically 1 Tim 3:11: *πιστὰς ἐν πᾶσιν*, (women) should be trustworthy in everything).

Thirdly, Paul uses it to describe himself (2 times) (typically 1 Cor 7:25: *πιστὸς εἶναι*, to be trustworthy), and his co-workers (5 times) (typically 1 Cor 4:17: *πιστὸν ἐν κυρίῳ*, (Timothy) faithful in the Lord).

Fourthly, *πιστός* is used 10 times as a reference to Christians (typically 1 Tim 6:2: *ὅτι πιστοὶ εἰσιν*, for they are believers). So, if we can confirm that *πιστός* is used to refer to Christians, can we confirm the construction we have here: an article + a noun + an article + an adjective used as noun? In fact, there are only two cases, found in the first letter to Timothy, where this adjective used as a noun is preceded by an article, namely:

1 Tim 4, 3	ἃ ὁ θεὸς ἐκτίσεν εἰς μετάληψιν μετὰ εὐχαριστίας τοῖς πιστοῖς	(foods) that God created for reception with thanksgiving by the believers
1 Tim 4, 12	Μηδεὶς σου τῆς νεότητος καταφρονεῖτω, ἀλλὰ τύπος γίνου τῶν πιστῶν	Let no one despise your youth, but be a model for the believers

We could not find another example in the whole corpus where *πιστός*, used as a noun in reference to Christians, would be placed in apposition to another noun in order to bring clarification¹¹¹. So, we need to conclude that the variant is showing something unique and is not part of Paul's style.

Looking closely at v. 14 on context of mixed marriages: if one partner is an unbeliever, the other ought to be a believer. When Paul writes: *ἡγίασται γὰρ ὁ ἀνὴρ ὁ ἄπιστος ἐν τῇ γυναικί* (For the husband the unbeliever has been made holy through the wife), then the wife is a believer; hence there is no need to add anything more. Since *τῇ πιστῇ* could be easily removed without any impact on the sentence's meaning, this is a sign that we are here facing an addition.

But why would a scribe bother taking the initiative of adding *τῇ πιστῇ*? The answer is provided by the following parallel clause:

14a	14b
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¹¹¹ The closest cases to it are Col 4:9 (*σὺν Ὀνησίμῳ τῷ πιστῷ καὶ ἀγαπητῷ ἀδελφῷ*, with Onesimus, the faithful and beloved brother) and Gal 3:9 (*ὥστε οἱ ἐκ πίστεως εὐλογοῦνται σὺν τῷ πιστῷ Ἀβραάμ*, so then those of faith are blessed with the believer Abraham). However, the word does not mean Christian in these cases.

ἡγίασαι γὰρ ὁ ἀνήρ ὁ ἄπιστος ἐν τῇ γυναίκι (τῇ πιστῇ)	καὶ ἡγίασαι ἡ γυναὴ ἡ ἄπιστος ἐν τῷ ἀδελφῷ
For the husband the unbeliever has been made holy through the wife the believer	And the wife the unbeliever has been made holy through the brother

Although we have two parallel clauses, there is an issue with the ending: the first clause ends originally with the unspecific woman or wife, but the second clause ends with a specific man: a brother or Christian. The scribe would have noticed this and decided to harmonize: the brother or Christian man will be matched by a Christian wife. But why did he not harmonize it by using ἀδελφή, sister? We can only guess that, due to his respect for the text, he wanted to minimize his change, and the easiest way was through a minor addition.

p. V. 14b

- Reading 1: καὶ ἡγίασαι ἡ γυναὴ ἡ ἄπιστος ἐν τῷ ἀδελφῷ (and the wife the unbeliever has been made holy through the brother).
- Reading 2: καὶ ἡγίασαι ἡ γυναὴ ἡ ἄπιστος ἐν τῷ ἀνδρὶ (and the wife the unbeliever has been made holy through the husband).
- Reading 3: καὶ ἡγίασαι ἡ γυναὴ ἡ ἄπιστος ἐν τῷ ἀνδρὶ τῷ πιστῷ (and the wife the unbeliever has been made holy through the husband of faith).

Reading 1 is supported by P⁴⁶, uncials κ* (scribe's firsthand), A, B, C, D* (scribe's firsthand), G, P, Ψ, minuscule 33, 181, 1739, 1877, 1962, and several old manuscripts Latin, Coptic, and Augustine.

Reading 2 is supported by uncials ²κ (second scribe's correction), D² (scribe's second hand), Byzantine text-type K and L, Alexandrian text-type minuscule (81, 326, 436, 1881), Byzantine text-type minuscule (330, 451, 1241), mixed text-type (with a Byzantine touch) minuscule (104, 614, 630, 1984, 1985, 2127, 2492, 2495), Byzantine Lection, other Byzantine text-type witnesses: Gothic, Ethiopic, Chrysostom, Theodoret and John-Damascus. Other witnesses include Alexandrian text-type Armenian translation and Clement of Alexandria, and Western text-type Syriac Harclean translation and Ephraem. Overall, we notice that there are not a lot of heavy weight witnesses¹¹².

Reading 3 is supported by the Byzantine text-type minuscule 629, and Western text-type old Latin, Vulgate, Peshitta, Irenaeus, Tertullian and Ambrosiaster. We ought to denote that minuscule 629 is a Latin-Greek diglot from the 14th century, and seems to have been revised according to the Vulgate¹¹³.

We have an issue here if we look back at the parallel found in v. 14a and 14b.

14a	14b
ἡγίασαι γὰρ ὁ ἀνήρ ὁ ἄπιστος ἐν τῇ γυναίκι	καὶ ἡγίασαι ἡ γυναὴ ἡ ἄπιστος ἐν τῷ ἀδελφῷ
For the husband the unbeliever has been made holy through the wife	And the wife the unbeliever has been made holy through the brother

In using ἀδελφῷ, 14b breaks the parallel with γυναίκι. We have seen earlier that a scribe repaired this break by introducing τῇ γυναίκι τῇ πιστῇ to match ἀδελφῷ. Now, it seems that another scribe would have chosen a different route: τῷ ἀδελφῷ being replaced with τῷ ἀνδρὶ (the husband), so that it would fully match τῇ γυναίκι (the wife).

Since τῷ ἀδελφῷ breaks the strict parallel, it becomes the *lectio difficilior*. And it is more probable that a scribe would have changed τῷ ἀδελφῷ with τῷ ἀνδρὶ to harmonize the text with τῇ γυναίκι, than the other way around. This argument added to poor manuscript support and the awareness of Byzantine text-type to avoid difficulty thrusts the decision toward τῷ ἀδελφῷ as the authentic reading. Moreover, ἀδελφῷ is a Pauline word (132 times in the corpus, and 38 times in 1 Corinthians) that will appear twice in the next verse, and so its position here does make good sense.

As to reading 3, we are left with the Vulgate and related Latin, as well as the Peshitta. Since we have already discarded τῷ ἀνδρὶ from the authentic reading, we need to also discard τῷ πιστῷ. Nonetheless, let us try to make sense of this addition.

The Vulgate says: *sanctificatus est enim vir infidelis in muliere fidei et sanctificata est mulier infidelis per virum fidelem* (For the unbelieving husband is sanctified by the believing wife: and the unbelieving wife is sanctified by **the believing husband**). We have a similar reading with the Syriac Peshitta: *mēqaddaš ū gēr gabrā 'aynā dēlā mēhaymen battētā damhaymēnā wamaqaddēšā y attētā 'aydā dēlā mēhaymēnā bēgabrā* (For the man who is not believing is sanctified by the wife who is believing; and any wife who is not believing is sanctified by **the husband who is believing**). This reading assumes two changes to the verse: first, the addition of "believing" to the word "wife" in 14a, and then "believing" to "husband" in v. 14b. Additionally, we have just seen that "husband" is a variant from "brother". So, in what state had the scribe found the manuscript before doing any change? It is hard to believe that he would have done all these changes: adding "believing" to

¹¹² We consider main witnesses P⁴⁶, Codex Sinaiticus (κ), Codex Alexandrinus (A), Codex Vaticanus (B), Codex Ephraemi Rescriptus (C) because of their seniority and their completeness or semi completeness.

¹¹³ See [Wikipedia](#), [Minuscule 629](#) and [New Testament Manuscripts](#), *Manuscript 629*, on Skypoint.

“wife”; changing “brother” to “man”; adding “believing” to “man”. Because Codex Augiensis (F) and Codex Boernerianus (G) shows “believing wife” in 14a, and “brother” in 14b, then we need to assume that “believing man” was not added at the same time as “believing wife”. By the same token, it is hard to understand that a scribe would have changed “brother” to “husband” (without the qualitative “believing”) if his source would read “believing woman”, he would have broken the strict parallel. This means that the change from “brother” to “husband” would have been made before the addition of “believing”. One possible sequence of events could be the following:

Firstly, a scribe would have harmonized 14b with 14a by changing “brother” to “husband” to match “wife”; this is the state of the tradition found in corrected Codex Sinaiticus and the Byzantine tradition in great part.

Secondly, another scribe not being aware of this change or discarding it, tried to harmonize 14b and 14a by adding “believing” to the word “wife” to match “brother”; this is the state of Codex Augiensis (F) and Codex Boernerianus (G).

Thirdly, yet another scribe seeing these two independent traditions: one showing “believing wife” in 14a, and the other “husband” in 14b, decided to merge them in his copy; this is the state of corrected Codex Claromontanus.

Fourthly, having two manuscripts, one with “believing wife” in 14a, the other with “husband” in 14b, a different scribe decided to add “believing” to “husband” to match “believing wife”; the latter is the state of the Vulgate and Peshitta’s source. In as much as this is highly hypothetical without foreseeing a confirmation, it has the merit of underlining the complexity of manuscripts’ tradition, and highlighting the fact that a scribe had likely more than one manuscript in front of him, and had made text change in good will through personal decisions.

q. V. 15c

- Reading 1: *ἐν δὲ εἰρήνῃ κέκληκεν ὑμᾶς ὁ θεός* (then in peace the God has called you).
- Reading 2: *ἐν δὲ εἰρήνῃ κέκληκεν ἡμᾶς ὁ θεός* (then in peace the God has called us).

Reading 1 is supported by the Alexandrian text-type uncials **ℵ*** (scribe’s first hand), A, C, minuscule 81, 326, Coptic Bohairic, Byzantine text-type uncial K, mixed text-type (Byzantine/Western) minuscule, 181, 1877, 1984, and 2127.

Reading 2 is supported by Alexandrian text-type P⁴⁶, uncials ²**ℵ** (second scribe’s correction), B, D, G, Ψ, minuscule 33, 436, 1739, 1881, Coptic and Armenian translations, Origen, Byzantine Lectionaries and Byzantine text-type (or with a touch of Byzantine text-type), minuscule 104, 330, 451, 614, 629, 630, 1241, 1962, 1985, 2492, 2495, Gothic and Ethiopic translations, Western text-type Old Latin, Vulgate, and Peshitta. At first glance, support for the variant is impressive.

We need to decide what is the authentic reading, *ὑμᾶς* (you) or *ἡμᾶς* (us). Is Paul talking about the call to peace for the mixed couples, or about the call to peace for all the Christians? The manuscripts in themselves cannot provide a definitive answer as both positions have good witnesses. So, the only approach left is to look at the context and Paul’s usage of the words “call” (*καλέω*) and “peace” (*εἰρήνη*).

Let us start with the context. At v. 15, Paul states that the Christian’s spouse has been made holy by her relationship with her Christian partner. As a supporting argument, he adds: “Otherwise indeed your (*ὑμῶν*) children would be unclean, but now [in fact] they are holy”. So, according to the context, the focus is on “you”. And in v. 16, there is no hint that the focus has changed when Paul says that the Christian is not bound, because of a call to peace by God.

When Paul uses the verb *καλέω* (to call), it is often in reference to God’s call, especially the call to become a Christian. If he may sometimes write in a generic fashion about God’s call, he usually reminds his audience about “their” call, and so he uses “you”: “by him you were called into the fellowship of his Son” (1 Cor 1:9); “a life worthy of God, who calls you into his own kingdom and glory” (1 Thess 2:12); “he called you through our proclamation of the good news” (2 Thess 2:14); “the one who called you in the grace of Christ” (Gal 1:6); “For you were called to freedom” (Gal 5:13); etc. There are only a few exceptions:

- “For God did not call us to impurity but in holiness” (1 Thess 4:7)
- “including us whom he has called” (Rom 9:24)
- “who saved us and called us with a holy calling” (2 Tim 1:9)

However, these three exceptions can be explained, because they refer to holiness and the mercy of God, to whom everyone is called, no matter the individual situation. In v. 15, Paul speaks about a very specific situation, mixed couples, which is not universal. The call to freedom refers specifically to this situation, namely when we read what he says later on: “Do not be mismatched with unbelievers” (2 Cor 6:14).

Εἰρήνη (peace) in the Pauline corpus can be grouped in three categories:

- 1) *χάρις* (grace), the usual Greco-Roman greeting, i.e. grace and peace, used by Paul to start his letters (1 Cor 1:3; 2 Cor 2:1; 1 Thess 1:1; etc);
- 2) security and absence of war or dispute or disorder (1 Cor 14:33; 16:11; 1 Thess 5:3; etc.);
- 3) the unique peace brought by God, his Spirit, Christ or the Gospel (1 Thess 5:23; Phil 4:7; Gal 5:22; etc.).

Indubitably, v. 15 refers to the second category, a life without dispute and disorder. In light of this, he should say “you”, and not “us”, since it refers to people involved in a specific situation that could cause trouble (as in 2 Co 13:11).

In conclusion, based on the context and Paul’s usage of “call” and “peace”, it is more probable that *ὁμᾶς* (you) is the authentic reading. But why would a scribe change *ὁμᾶς* (you) to *ἡμᾶς* (us)? As we have seen, one meaning of peace refers to the unique peace brought by God, his Spirit, Christ, or the Gospel; hence, it is possible that he wanted to broaden the scope of Paul’s call as to encompass all Christian readers and give this verse a universal dimension.

III. Analysis of 1 Cor 7: 1-16

A. 7: 1-7: Spouse Relationship

Earlier we have studied the context of the entire 1 Corinthians letter and of its chapter 7. We are now proceeding with the detailed analysis phase that will further examine Paul’s written words, for which our restless exploration will keenly navigate throughout the whole Pauline corpus¹¹⁴; however, should a supporting object be coming from a letter which authenticity is disputed, we will qualify our premise accordingly.

1. v. 1 Question from Corinthians

Περί δὲ ὧν ἐγράψατε, καλὸν ἀνδρῶπι γυναικὸς μὴ ἄπτεσθαι (Then about things you have written, it is good for a man not to be touching a woman)

Περί (about) is a preposition well known in the Greek vocabulary, literally meaning “round about, all round”, but used to denote the object about or for which one does something or speaks about¹¹⁵. We find it 51 times in the Pauline corpus, i.e. in all letters, except Galatians. But if we focus on cases where the word introduces the sentence as it is the case here, then we notice that the word is found 10 times, 7 times in 1 Cor; once in 2 Cor and twice in 1 Thess.

- 1 Cor 7:1 Then (*Περί*) about things you have written
- 1 Cor 7:25 Then (*Περί*) about virgins
- 1 Cor 8:1 Then (*Περί*) about things sacrificed to idols
- 1 Cor 8:4 So (*Περί*) about the eating
- 1 Cor 12:1 Then (*Περί*) about spiritual gifts
- 1 Cor 16:1 Then (*Περί*) about the collection for the saints
- 1 Cor 16:12 Then (*Περί*) about Apollos, the brother
- 2 Cor 9:1 For indeed (*Περί*) about the service, the one for the saints
- 1 Thess 4:9 Then (*Περί*) about the brotherly love
- 1 Thess 5:1 Then (*Περί*) about the times and the seasons

We notice that Paul steadily introduces a new topic with *Περί*, except in 1 Cor 8:4 where it is used to come back to a topic he has just introduced after a short parenthesis; this finding confirms that the onset of chapter 7 introduces a new topic. Otherwise, the preposition simply refers to the target of an action, for instance: “I give thanks to my God always about (*περὶ*) you”¹¹⁶ (1 Cor 1:4).

ἐγράψατε (you have written). This is the aorist (action completed), active indicative 2nd tense plural of the verb *γράφω* (to write). Most of the time in the Pauline corpus, this verb is used in the passive tense referring to the Scriptures, 38 times out of 62 (for instance 1 Cor 1:19: “For it is written”, followed by Is 29:14). It is also the case in: Romans (19 out of 21), 1 Corinthians (11 out of 18), Galatians (5 out of 7), 2 Corinthians (3 out of 10) where Paul insists on teaching his theology this way to a community somewhat familiar with the Jewish Bible¹¹⁷. Otherwise, 22 times does this verb refer to Paul or his scribe writing or having written a letter; more specifically, in 10 of these instances, it says that Paul (or his scribe) is currently writing a letter (1 Cor 4:14; 9:15; 14:37; 2 Cor 13:10; 2 Thess 3:17; Phil 3:1; Gal 1:20; 6:11; Rom 16:22; Philem 1:19; 1 Tim 3:14); 8 times, Paul mentions a previous letter he had written (1 Cor 5:9.11; 2 Cor 1:13; 2:3.4.9; 7:12; Rom 15:15); and 3 times, this verb is used in a rhetoric manner to support the idea that what Paul is speaking about does not need to be written down (2 Cor 9:1; 1 Thess 4:9; 5:1). So, we are left with a unique case where *γράφω* refers to a letter sent to Paul, which is our verse. This leaves us with a few conjectures:

- Only a structured and well-organized community could have a letter be sent on their behalf.
- Using such a mean of communication depicts a community with at least a few educated members.

¹¹⁴ Author Michel Quesnel: ‘There are seven letters whose Paul’s authorship is not disputed among scholars, i.e. 1 and 2 Corinthians, Romans, Galatians, 1 Thessalonians, Philippians, and Philemon; also accepted are both letters, Colossians and a good portion of 2 Timothy as authentic’. See *Saint Paul et les commencements du christianisme*. Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 2008, p. 125-147.

¹¹⁵ See Henry George Liddell, Robert Scott, *op. cit.*, *περί*.

¹¹⁶ In the Pauline corpus, *περὶ ὑμῶν* (about you) and *περὶ ἡμῶν* (about us) are used 20 times, a very common usage.

¹¹⁷ We may notice these 38 occurrences where *γράφω* refers to Scriptures and is found in the undisputed letters.

- Paul would enjoy writing and seeing it as a communication channel of choice.¹¹⁸

Καλόν (good) is the masculine accusative singular of the adjective *καλός* (good, right, beautiful). In the Pauline corpus, the adjective recurs 40 times, and its closely related adverb *καλῶς* (well, rightly), 11 times. How could both words help us understand Paul's statements? What is right and good for him? Let us first drive carefully by gradually cruising through those undisputed letters¹¹⁹. We could group all his statements in three major categories:

- In many cases, Paul talks in very generic manner: "Do not quench the Spirit. Do not despise the words of prophets, but test (*δοκιμάζω*) everything; hold fast to what is good (*καλός*)" (1 Thess 5, 21). To discover what is good/right (*καλός*), we need to further explore (*δοκιμάζω*). Paul endeavours "to do what is right (*καλός*) not only in the Lord's sight but also in the sight of others" (2 Cor 2:21); and preaches, for the Christian community, "to God that you may not do anything wrong... that you may do what is right (*καλός*)" (2 Cor 13:7). Also, in Rom 12:17, he recommends: "Do not be repaying anyone evil for evil, but providing the right things in the sight of all"¹²⁰.
- Paul's message is that "right" could not be fully unconditional, since something could be right in one aspect and wrong or less right in another. A typical example comes from sections where Paul addresses the issue regarding the consumption of meat sacrificed to idols, which do not really exist, that has no impact on our relationship to God (see 1 Cor 8); he nonetheless writes: "It is good (*καλός*) not to eat meat or drink wine or do anything that makes your brother or sister stumble" (Rom 14:21); for it is better for someone else that you do not proceed with this good for yourself; while Corinthians pray in tongues, Paul advises: "For you may give thanks well (*καλῶς*), but the other person is not built up" (1 Cor 14:17). Similarly, Paul has decided in Corinth not to be sponsored so as to avoid false perception: "But I have made no use of any of these rights, nor am I writing this so that they may be applied in my case. Indeed, I would rather (*καλός*) die than that — no one will deprive me of my ground for boasting!" (1 Cor 9:15). Furthermore, Paul stipulates: "So then, he who marries his fiancée does well (*καλῶς*); and he who refrains from marriage will do better" (1 Cor 7:38).
- Moreover, we denote that sometimes Paul refers to what is right in an ironical manner when a bad behaviour comes from his audience; upon hearing about sexual immorality in Corinth, he says: "Your boasting is not a good thing (*καλός*). Do you not know that a little yeast leavens the whole batch of dough?" (1 Cor 5:6). Paul does likewise with some opponents in Corinth: "If you receive [...] a different gospel from the one you accepted, you submit to it readily enough (*καλῶς*)" (2 Cor 11:4). So he needs to make his audience aware that what they believe is right, is in fact not right. To the Galatians, he writes about a group who tries to destabilize them: "They are not rightly (*καλῶς*) zealous after you; they want to exclude you (from us), so that you may be zealous after them" (Gal 4:17). Cognizant of human challenges, Paul warns soundly good people about pretendedly good people, and to watch out for them¹²¹.

These discoveries prompt us to thrust making two further reflections:

- The premise "it is good for a man not to be touching a woman" is so clear-cut and different from Paul usual approach in discussing what is right, that it would have had to originate 'from-the-outside-in', the Corinthians' letter.
- If, according to Paul, what is good depends on a concrete action and what is intended by its actor, then we are most likely to forecast that Paul will use the same script to answer the question from the Corinthians' letter.

Regarding the meaning of *καλός*, J. C. Hurd¹²² excerpted some scholars' view on it, and grouped them in four categories:

- While ones give the term a fully utilitarian and pragmatic meaning, it does not refer to what is morally good but to an attitude that may be useful.
- Others interpret the term in reference to a "moral good", though only as one good among several goods of somewhat equal value (for instance, celibacy is good, marriage is good as well).
- Some consider the expression to be the goal of morality, the highest member of a lesser goods series (for instance, marriage is good, but celibacy is better).

¹¹⁸ This is reflected by a comment from members of the community brought by Paul: "I do not want to seem as though I am trying to frighten you with my letters. For they say, 'His letters are weighty and strong, but his bodily presence is weak, and his speech contemptible.'" (2 Cor 10:9-10)

¹¹⁹ See note 117.

¹²⁰ Commenting 1 Thessalonians, J. Murphy-O'Connor writes: "The directives he gives are a mixture of advice and precepts. The latter, however, are entirely generic (1 Thess. 5: 13b–22) — they concern values rather than structures... Paul did not consider it his role to tell them what to do", *op. cit.*, p. 126-127.

¹²¹ This is developed in Romans, chap. 7. For instance, "So I find it to be a law that when I want to do what is good (*καλός*), evil lies close at hand" (7:21).

¹²² John Coolidge Hurd, *The Origin of 1 Corinthians*. Macon (CA): Mercer University Press, 1983 (new ed.), p. 158-160.

- iv. Only a few of the Fathers understood the term to mean here an absolute of ethical conduct beside which no other behaviour could be called good (for instance, celibacy is the only good and mandatory, marriage is evil)¹²³.

Based on our analysis of Paul's usage of *καλόν*, we believe that the third category is the proper one to interpret it. For the "good" cannot be specified in advance; thus, it depends on a specific context for something one is striving for (2 Cor 8:21) "for we intend to do what is right not only in the Lord's sight but also in the sight of others"; therefore, not all goods are of equal value, and likewise some goods are better than others (1 Cor 7:38) "he who marries his fiancée does well; and he who refrains from marriage will do better". This is also the position of Hurd who writes: "The word *καλόν* has had a long and honourable history as an ethical ideal of the highest rank"¹²⁴.

ἄνθρωπος (man) is a frequent word in the Pauline corpus with 126 occurrences. However, we need to note that though referring to a human being, it receives different meanings, and therefore plays different roles. To understand the various nuances of this word, we have grouped its occurrences in six categories. Although there are sometimes no clear-cut boundaries between these categories, they help us to single out the different applications of the word.

- i. Firstly, *ἄνθρωπος* could refer to a specific individual, a unique human being (29% of the times). For instance, "So let someone (*ἄνθρωπος*) think of us as servants of Christ and stewards of God's mysteries" (1 Cor 4:1); or "But let an individual (*ἄνθρωπος*) examine himself and only then eat of the bread and drink of the cup" (1 Cor 11:28); or "I know a person (*ἄνθρωπος*) in Christ who fourteen years ago was caught up to the third heaven — whether in the body or out of the body I do not know; God knows" (2 Cor 12:2); or "God accepts no man's (*ἄνθρωπος*) person" (God shows no partiality with any individual) (Gal 2:6). In all these cases, *ἄνθρωπος* would be translated as: a person, an individual.
- ii. Secondly, *ἄνθρωπος* could refer to man as opposed to God who is omni-directional, -potent, -present, -scient, which is not the case for man who is so limited that God's world escapes him. For instance, "God's foolishness is wiser than men (*ἄνθρωπος*) (wisdom), and God's weakness is stronger than men (*ἄνθρωπος*) (strength)" (1 Cor 1:25); or "The psychical man (*ἄνθρωπος*) does not receive the gifts of God's Spirit, for they are foolishness to him, and he is unable to understand them because they are spiritually discerned" (1 Cor 2:14); or "We also constantly give thanks to God for this, that when you received the word of God that you heard from us, you accepted it not as a word of men (*ἄνθρωπος*) but as what it really is, God's word, which is also at work in you believers" (1 Thess 2:13); or "Am I now seeking approval of men (*ἄνθρωπος*), or God's approval? Or am I trying to please men (*ἄνθρωπος*)? If I were still pleasing men (*ἄνθρωπος*), I would not be a servant of Christ" (Gal 1:10). In all of these instances, *ἄνθρωπος* highlights the human being's limitations in the context of God's action, word, and gifts.
- iii. Thirdly, *ἄνθρωπος* could refer to man as a biological entity, as a species in the living world, which includes the normal way of functioning and thinking as a human being in the daily life. For instance, "Not all flesh is alike, but there is one flesh for men (*ἄνθρωπος*), another for animals, another for birds, and another for fish" (1 Cor 15:29); or "but (he) emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, having been made in the likeness of men (*ἄνθρωπος*)" (Phil 2:7); or "Brothers and sisters, I am speaking according to a man (*ἄνθρωπος*): once a person's will has been ratified, no one adds to it or annuls it" (Gal 3:15); or "and they exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling a mortal man (*ἄνθρωπος*) or birds or four-footed animals or reptiles" (Rom 1:23). In all these cases, the word conveys the idea of a mortal creature, experiencing what is typical for all living beings, assuming usual human fate.
- iv. Fourthly, *ἄνθρωπος* could refer to a very generic meaning and designate the overall population of a church or a country or the world, conveying the idea of an audience. For instance, "You yourselves are our letter, written on our hearts, to be known and read by all men (*ἄνθρωπος*)" (2 Cor 3:2); or "Therefore, knowing the fear of the Lord, we try to persuade men (*ἄνθρωπος*)" (2 Cor 5:11); or "who (the Jews) killed both the Lord Jesus and the prophets, and drove us out; they displease God and oppose to all men (*ἄνθρωπος*)" (1 Thess 2:15); or "Let your gentleness be known to all men (*ἄνθρωπος*). The Lord is near" (Phil 4:5). So *ἄνθρωπος* here has almost a statistical meaning, referring to a: group, cluster, whole population.
- v. Fifthly, *ἄνθρωπος* could refer to a sub-group having special characteristics, positive or negative ones. For instance, "and that we may be rescued from wicked and evil men (*ἄνθρωπος*); for not all have faith" (2 Thess 3:2); or "The sins of some men (*ἄνθρωπος*) are conspicuous and precede them to judgment, while the sins of others follow them there" (1 Tim 5:24); or "not paying attention to Jewish myths or to commandments of men (*ἄνθρωπος*) who reject the truth" (Titus 1:14); or "As Jannes and Jambres opposed Moses, so these men (*ἄνθρωπος*), of corrupt mind and counterfeit faith, also oppose the truth" (2 Tim 3:8). Although this meaning of *ἄνθρωπος* does not apply to everyone, it targets a sample or a subset of a full population.
- vi. Sixthly, *ἄνθρωπος* could refer to man as opposed to woman found here in verse (1 Cor 7:1). Thus far, all instances of *ἄνθρωπος* steadily include women. However, there are two exceptions in Paul's writings where the word "man" refers to the masculine gender. The first is this passage from the letter to the Ephesians: "For this reason a man (*ἄνθρωπος*) will

¹²³ Tertullian (*On Monogamy*): "Good, he (Paul) says, it is for a man not to have contact with a woman. It follows that it is evil to have contact with her; for nothing is contrary to good except evil." Also, Jerome (*Adversus Jovinianum*, I, 7): "If it is good not to touch a woman, it is bad to touch one: for there is no opposite to goodness but badness". These quotes come from J. C. Hurd, *op. cit.*, p. 159, note 4.

¹²⁴ *Op. cit.*, p. 160.

leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two will become one flesh” (Eph 5:31). However, this passage is a quotation from Genesis 2:24 in the Septuagint. So, we are left with only 1 Cor 7:1 featuring *ἄνθρωπος* being the opposite of woman, and which could be Paul's only use of the word. Thus, it is unlikely that *ἄνθρωπος* in verse 1 is from Paul's hand, and we must therefore conclude that it is an excerpt from the question raised by the Corinthians in their letter to Paul.

Let's summarize our findings on *ἄνθρωπος* with the following table.

	1 Thess	2 Thess	Phil	1 Cor	2 Cor	Gal	Rom	Col	Eph	Philem	1 Tim	Titus	2 Tim	Total
Individual		1		10	3	6	12	3			1	1	2	39
Vs God	4			16	1	7	3	3	1					35
Human species			2	3		1	8	1	6		4			25
Population	1		1	1	4		4		1		3	3	1	19
Group		1									2	1	2	6
Vs woman				1					1					2
Total	5	2	3	31	8	14	27	7	9	0	10	5	5	126

Through this analysis we can state that *ἄνθρωπος* as opposed to woman does not belong to Paul's vocabulary and can only come from the Corinthians through their question in the letter.

Γυνή (woman, wife, spouse) is found 64 times in the Pauline corpus, but mainly in 1 Corinthians, 41 times (64%), and of which *γυνή* is found 22 times (54%) in its chapter 7. Considering the whole Pauline corpus, we notice that *γυνή* appears in the context of her relationship to a man, 88% of the time; hence, a woman is rarely presented for her own sake. Let us look into this *γυνή* in relationship context.

i. Woman and man relationship

1 Corinthians 7 demonstrates a striking parallelism between what is said about men and what is said about women concerning rules, rights, duties, roles, or responsibilities, so stringent as if one is equal to the other.

- Duties: the man should render what is due to his wife, and the woman should render what is due to her husband (7:3).
- Body ownership: the man has authority on his wife's body, and the woman has authority on her husband's body (7:4).
- Divorce: a woman should not be separated from her husband (7:10), and a man should not dismiss his wife (7:11).
- Mixed couple: a Christian man should not dismiss his unbelieving wife if she consents to live with him (7:12), and a Christian woman should not dismiss her unbelieving husband if he consents to live with her (7:13).
- Single people: if a single man marries, he does not sin, and if a single woman marries, she does not sin (7:28).
- Daily life concerns for single people: the unmarried man cares for the things of the Lord, how he should please the Lord (7:32), and either the unmarried woman or the virgin cares for the things of the Lord (7:34).
- Daily life concerns for married people: the married man cares for the things of the world, how he should please the wife (7:33), and the married woman cares for the things of the world, how she should please the husband (7:33).

All of these verses reveal that what is said regarding man and woman is interchangeable, indicating a *total* equality. However on divorce (v. 10-11), Paul has used the verb *ἀφίημι* (dismiss) for the man, but *χωρίζω* in the aorist passive infinitive tense (be separated) is used for the woman, which is an equivalent; while a man can dismiss his wife, a woman can only "be separated" from her husband, submitting herself to the husband initiative or opposing it. This reflects the Jewish milieu where only the man can dismiss his spouse, and it is different from v. 13 where both man and woman can dismiss a spouse (in which *ἀφίημι* is used for both), a reflection of the Greco-Roman cultural setting¹²⁵. Does this mean that Paul's view on marital relationship varies depending on the social-cultural milieu? And so would the strict equality between men and woman be only valid in a Greco-Roman culture? Although this will be further discussed when analyzing v. 10-11, we may at this point unveil that Paul views man and woman rights and duties to be on the same level.

Nonetheless, Paul differs from this approach in his letter to Romans (7:2-3):

2 Thus a married woman is bound by the law to her husband as long as he lives; but if her husband dies, she is discharged from the law concerning the husband. 3 Accordingly, she will be called an adulteress if she lives with another man while her husband is alive. But if her husband dies, she is free from that law, and if she marries another man, she is not an adulteress.

¹²⁵ This is pinpointed by J. Murphy-O'Connor, *The Divorced Woman in 1 Cor 7:10-11*, *JournBibLit*, 100 (1981), p. 602.

Then, only the woman seems to be bound by the law, and potentially become an adulteress; could a man not also be an adulterer? The reality here is that Paul is not providing any teaching on marital union but only using the current legal Jewish practice to illustrate the binding aspect of the law as an introduction to his teaching later on about Christian freedom from that law. Hence, Romans 7 cannot be used to understand Paul's view on men and women.

If we move away from marital relationship to the broader scope of men and women in the church and society, then the tone changes and the cultural world of the 1st century shows up, especially the Jewish one. Let's look closely at what Paul is saying.

Starting with 1 Cor 11:2-16, this section is introduced by Paul commending Corinthians for maintaining the traditions just as he taught them; then, he goes onto addressing the issue of unveiled women in the church. He brings forward three supportive arguments for this behaviour as unacceptable:

- a. The first argument (v. 3-7) is based on the Hellenistic-Jewish school tradition that promotes a cosmology where God is the archetype, which Paul extrapolates by stating that woman's head (*κεφαλή*) is the man, the man's head (*κεφαλή*) is Christ, and the Christ's head (*κεφαλή*) is God. Therefore, man must not veil his head, since he is the image (*εἰκὼν*) and reflection (*δόξα*) of God; while it is the opposite for woman, since not being veiled is like being shaved off making herself a disgrace, which would prevent her from being the image and reflection of man¹²⁶.
- b. The second argument (v. 8-13) originates from Genesis 2:22 (about the rib that the Lord God had taken from the man he made it into a woman) and 2:18 ("It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper as his partner"): "man had not been made from woman, but rather woman was made from man. Neither had man been created for the sake of woman, but rather woman for the sake of man". Therefore, women ought to have a symbol of God's authority on their head, as angels, who can witness the creation's plan, are present in the church¹²⁷.
- c. The third argument stems from the teaching of nature (vv. 13-15); men, these days "naturally" wear short hair and women, long hair.

Our goal is not to discuss the validity of Paul's arguments, but to somehow understand his thinking on where women fit in regard to men.

The first argument brings to light that should, in our modern culture, woman reflect man and man reflect Christ or God be equivalent to a statement of inferiority on woman, Paul does not demonstrate it well. We have a cosmological presentation of everyone's role in the creation: since one cannot say that a cat is inferior to a dog, or a dog inferior to a cow, by the same token one cannot say that a woman is inferior to a man; all creatures received a unique place and role in the universe, and their greatness in which they reflect God's glory is to stay in that place and play that role.

The second argument, based on Genesis 2, stipulates that man is first in the order of creation and that woman has been created for the sake of man. Such a statement can easily give way to discrimination, and was in fact used in Jewish circles to establish the inferiority and subordination of woman¹²⁸. To avoid such a declaration, Paul adds that in Christ man is not independent of woman as man comes through woman, and all things come from God (vv. 11-12). Commenting these verses, J. Murphy-O'Connor wrote:

"1 Corinthians 11: 11-12 is the first and only explicit defence of the complete equality of women in the New Testament. Paul overturned the traditional argument from the chronological priority of the male in the creation narrative by pointing out that the chronological priority of woman in the birth of a male is just as much part of God's plan for the order of his creation (1 Cor. 11: 12). This elementary argument functions as proof for the principle, 'As Christians, woman is not otherwise than man, and man is not otherwise than woman' (v. 11). Equality is the issue here, not complementarity"¹²⁹.

The third argument is from nature according to Paul, though we could say that it comes from culture. It only shows that Paul was indebted to the fashion of his time when men had short haircuts, and women long hair, unrelated to inequality.

After this brief review of 1 Cor 11:2-16, we could conclude that the latter argument (vv. 13-15) is in line with chapter 7: in Christ, men and women are equal, with the same rights, and when speaking of one gender, Paul carefully balances it with

¹²⁶ H. Conzelmann, *op. cit.*, p. 182-191. For him *κεφαλή*, *εἰκὼν*, and *δόξα* are almost synonymous.

¹²⁷ For H. Conzelmann, *op. cit.*, p. 189, it means: woman ought to have a symbol of authority on her head, to compensate for her weakness over against cosmic power. C. Senft, *op. cit.*, groups scholars' hypothesis in three categories (p. 141-142), but adds that they are all unacceptable and proposes nothing else. Our stance is based on the fact that Paul has just spoken of the order of creation, and angels in the Jewish culture are God's presence in the world, especially when the community gathers for prayer, and for Paul, they play a role in God's plan (see for instance Gal 3, 20 where the law was ordained through angels by Moses).

¹²⁸ Flavius Josephus, *Against Apion*, 2.25-26: "For, says the scripture, *A woman is inferior to her husband in all things*. Let her therefore be obedient to him. Not so, that he should abuse her; but that she may acknowledge her duty to her husband. For God hath given the authority to the husband" (transl. William Whiston).

¹²⁹ J. Murphy-O'Connor, *Paul, A Critical Life*, p. 290.

the other gender. At the same time, he sees no point in throwing out the universal oriental practice of veiled women¹³⁰. Why? Even though this is not explicitly stated, we may advance two reasons:

- Some community members could have misinterpreted Paul's message on Christian freedom, likely those who indulged in experiences of the Spirit and who could be called enthusiasts¹³¹, and have possibly felt at liberty to get rid of earthly fashion practice related to women headgears. Paul's concerns with such practices were not only about misinterpretation of his preaching, but also about jeopardizing the unity of that fairly shaken Corinthian community.
- Another reason might have been related to perception from outsiders. Paul brings this argument with respect to speaking in tongues: "If, therefore, the whole church comes together and all speak in tongues, and outsiders or unbelievers enter, will they not say that you are out of your mind?" (1 Cor 14:23). Additionally, the newly founded Thessalonian community has had experienced persecution: "the hint of a new 'god', who would radically transform the situation of the underprivileged, would have been perceived by the municipal authorities as subversive"¹³². Notwithstanding a different situation in Corinth where there is no word of persecution, the echo of a "women liberation" movement would not only have been a distraction, but would have sent a wrong message too.

Firstly, regarding Paul's style of talking about men and women in a parallel pattern, he mentions the woman at the onset, then the man. Secondly, we should not be misled by the verb "be subject" (*υποτάσσω*) as if a woman is inferior. Let us give a few examples of the usage of *υποτάσσω* that could enlighten the matter:

- 1 Cor 16:16 "I urge you to put yourselves at the service (*υποτάσσω*) of such people (the household of Stephanas), and of everyone who works and toils with them"
- Rom 13: 1 "Let every person be subject (*υποτάσσω*) to the governing authorities; for there is no authority except from God, and those authorities that exist have been instituted by God"

Two things ought to be clear: *υποτάσσω* has a flavour of *service*, and it follows God's rule to organize the world in an orderly manner. There is nothing negative in "being subject", it rather means accepting our role in society; therefore, according to Paul, accepting the order established by God. All this does not prevent Paul from seeing man and woman with equal rights; his call for husband to love his wife and to never treat her harshly (*πικραίνω*: make bitter, irritate) wouldn't make sense if they were not equal. Moreover, we can mention 1 Colossians 3:18-19¹³³:

Wives, be subject (*υποτάσσω*) to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord. Husbands, love your wives and never treat them harshly.

ii. Woman outside marital relationship

In fact, there is only one case, and it is 1 Cor 14: 34-35:

34 women should be silent in the churches. For they are not permitted (*επιτρέπω*) to speak, but should be subordinate (*υποτάσσω*), as the law also says. 35 If there is anything they desire to know (*μανθάνω*), let them ask their husbands at home. For it is shameful for a woman to speak in church.

After reviewing Paul statements on women, this section looks weirdly different: while Paul usually talks in strictly parallel fashion of men and women, and when requiring specific behaviour from women, he is always at pain in providing a rational, here there is nothing, except clear-cut command to woman to shut up. And this command contradicts the discussion in 1 Cor 11:5 we have just seen where Paul assumes that women can pray and prophesize, except they need to be veiled. In the very same letter, how could Paul be so different? So up front, these two verses become suspicious. And if we look at the manuscript tradition, we find it unstable: a good portion of the Western text-type (D^p, F^p, G^p, 88) have v. 34-35 at the end of 14:40, after Paul has written: but all things should be done decently and in order. This means that a scribe noticed the anomaly and believed that these two verses would fit better after Paul asked for order. So could these verses be an interpolation by someone else than Paul? It seems so for the following reasons.

- V. 34-35 interrupts the logical flow of Paul's thinking about the prophets that goes from v. 29 through 40 and could be explained this way:
 - a) General rule: (29) Let two or three prophets speak, and let the others weigh what is said
 - Application of the rule: (30) If a revelation is made to someone else sitting nearby, let the first person be silent
 - Rationale of the rule: (31) For you can all prophesy one by one, so that all may learn and all be encouraged
 - Conclusion: (32-33) And the spirits of prophets are subject to judgment the prophets, for God is a God not of disorder but of peace as this is the case in all the churches of the saints¹³⁴

¹³⁰ H. Conzelmann believes that wearing a veil was a universal practice in public, including in Corinth. See *op. cit.*, p. 185, note 40.

¹³¹ This is H. Conzelmann wording, see *op. cit.*, p. 15-16.

¹³² J. Murphy-O'Connor, *op. cit.*, p. 118.

¹³³ J. Murphy-O'Connor states that letters to Colossians and to Philemon were written in identical circumstances to groups which overlapped considerably. See *op. cit.*, p. 176. In our view, only Ephesians, 1 Timothy and Titus are letters that are probably not from Paul's pen, but a disciple.

¹³⁴ For most scholars, the interpolation starts with 33b (As in all the churches of the saints), but J. Murphy-O'Connor has convincingly argued that the latter have been blinded by the critical editions of the translation and didn't see that "all the churches of the saints" would have been

b) Challenging the community on current behaviour:

i. They don't own God's word (36):

Did the word of God originate with you?
Are you the only ones it has reached?

ii. God's command is the criteria (37-38)

-(37) A real prophet acknowledges that what I am writing to you is a command of the Lord

-(38) A false prophet does not recognize this and will not be recognized as a prophet

Conclusion and final exhortation (39-40)

-(39) Be eager to prophesy, and do not forbid speaking in tongues;

-(40) But all things should be done decently and in order

As we can see the whole context is related the current role of prophets in the community and we have a hint that there was some kind of disorder that didn't look quite beneficial. Paul was probably made aware by people coming to Ephesus. And so he proposed a generic rule (part a) before challenging the community (part b) to comply with this rule, reminding them of God's ownership of his word and the necessity of order. In this context, v. 34-35 comes out of the blue and totally interrupts the logical flow: it has nothing to do with order when prophesying. Therefore, they are an interpolation¹³⁵.

- Some of the words in v. 33-34 make no sense under Paul's pen, namely νόμος, in the sense of a disciplinary measure. On the contrary, for Paul, νόμος refers to the Jewish Law given by Moses. Let's give a few examples in 1 Corinthians:
 - 9:8-9 "Do I say this on human authority? Does not the law (νόμος) also say the same? For it is written in the law (νόμος) of Moses, "You shall not muzzle an ox while it is treading out the grain." Is it for oxen that God is concerned?"
 - 9:20 "To the Jews I became as a Jew, in order to win Jews. To those under the law (νόμος) I became as one under the law (νόμος) (though I myself am not under the law (νόμος)) so that I might win those under the law (νόμος)"
 - 14:21 "In the law (νόμος) it is written, 'By people of strange tongues and by the lips of foreigners I will speak to this people; yet even then they will not listen to me'"
 - 15:56 "The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law (νόμος)"
- Finally, v. 34-35 is a clone of 1 Timothy 2: 11-15 that says:
 - 11 Let a woman learn (μανθάνω) in silence with full submission (ὑποταγή). 12 I permit (ἐπιτρέπω) no woman to teach or to have authority over a man; she is to keep silent. 13 For Adam was formed first, then Eve; 14 and Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor. 15 Yet she will be saved through childbearing, provided they continue in faith and love and holiness, with modesty.

1 Timothy statement on Adam and Eve contradicts Paul's statements elsewhere on Adam and Eve, namely Rom 5:12-21 and 1 Cor 15:21-22, 45-49 where Adam was the real transgressor and Eve the prototype of the entire Corinthian community. This is only one point among others contributing to conclude that 1 Timothy is un-Pauline¹³⁶. There is similarity between 1 Timothy 2: 11-15 and 1 Corinthians 14:34-35, not only on the content (women need to keep silence), but on the vocabulary (ἐπιτρέπω, μανθάνω, ὑποτάσσω/ὑποταγή). So it is highly probable that a scribe tried to harmonize Paul 1 Corinthians with 1 Timothy. And this scribe probably belonged to a Jewish Christian conservative community who was uncomfortable with Paul's openness to women's role in the community¹³⁷.

What to conclude of our analysis of γυνή? Paul is thoroughly consistent on presenting women in relationship with men having equal rights, carefully ensuring what is said of men is also said of women. Of course, he is indebted to the cosmology of his Hellenic-Jewish strict hierarchy from God to women, including angels and men, and the biblical presentation of woman's creation. Whereby playing a different role does not mean inferiority, respecting oriental tradition on the veil does not mean inferiority either.

Additionally, ἀπτεσθαι, is the verb ἄπτω in the present passive/middle voice infinitive tense, which has two different basic meanings: 1. Fasten, bind, join, grasp, engage in, undertake, touch, affect, reach, lay hands on; and 2. Kindle, set on fire¹³⁸. This case refers to two physical bodies that were apart and are now engaged into a relationship. Through the whole Pauline corpus, the word occurs only 3 times. Supplementing our current verse, we have:

an unnecessary duplication of v. 34, i.e. we would have: As in all the churches of the saints, women should be silent in the churches. See his *Interpolations in 1 Corinthians*, CBO, 48(1986)90.

¹³⁵ This is as well the view of H. Conzelmann, *op. cit.*, p. 246, C. Senft, *op. cit.*, p. 182-183, J. Murphy-O'Connor in both his *Interpolations in 1 Corinthians*, CBO, 48(1986)90-92, and *Paul. A Critical Life*, p. 289-290. Strangely, H. Conzelmann includes v. 36 in the interpolation on the ground that, even though this verse is "hardly very clear", it "is meant to underline the 'ecumenical' validity of the interpolation" and does not link up with v. 37. *Sed contra*, Murphy-O'Connor in his *Interpolations* sees v. 36, containing rhetorical questions, "perfectly in place as a passionate outburst condemning the situation that required the directives of vv 26-33", and "the angry tone carries over into v 37, which certainly refers to vv 26-33".

¹³⁶ This has been pinpointed by J. Murphy-O'Connor in *Interpolations in 1 Corinthians*, CBO, 48(1986), p. 92.

¹³⁷ C. Senft, *op. cit.*, p. 183, mentions the masculinization of the ministries in the late apostolic era to the point where even female deacon disappeared.

¹³⁸ Henry George Liddell, Robert Scott, *op. cit.*, ἄπτω.

- 2 Cor 6:17 “Therefore come out from the midst of them (unbelievers), and be separate from them, says the Lord, and touch (*ἄπτω*) nothing unclean; then I will welcome you”.
- Col 2:21 (dietary regulations) “Do not handle (*ἄπτω*), Do not taste, Do not touch”.

In 2 Corinthians, Paul asks Christians to avoid mismatched relationship with unbelievers. In 2 Colossians, Paul asks Christians not to let anyone condemn them on matters of food and drink or on observing festivals, new moons, or Sabbaths; and so to disregard comments like: do not touch this food. Thus, only in 2 Cor 6:17 is the verb *ἄπτω* referring to human relationship.

We can conclude that *ἄπτω* is not part of Paul’s usual vocabulary, and this supports our previous statement that “it is good for a man not to be touching a woman” is an extract from the Corinthians’ letter. But at the same time, the word is well known in the Old Testament and is sometimes used as a euphemism for sexual relations:

- Gen 20:6 LXX: “Then God said to him (Abimelech) in the dream, “Yes, I know that you did this with a pure heart, and I spared you, so that you should not sin against me. Therefore, I didn’t allow you to touch (*ἄπτω*) her.
- Prov 6:29 LXX: “So is he who goes in to his neighbour’s wife. Whoever touches (*ἄπτω*) her will not be unpunished.

This interpretation of *ἄπτω* is supported by what follows (1 Cor 7: 2-5) where Paul talks about marital sexual relationship. And if we are right, then we can assume that the Corinthians were asking if it was good for a man to avoid sexual intercourse while being married¹³⁹.

Nevertheless, we cannot wrap up our analysis of v. 1 without raising the question: Why are some Corinthians asking this type of question? Who are they? What is the issue? There ought to have been a few reasons why one would advocate abstinence while being married:

- There may be a negative perception of sex that could be associated with animal behaviour, and therefore unworthy of a “spiritual” human being.
- There may be reasons to avoid having children, either because the environment is not favourable for kids and doesn’t present a bright future, or one wants to focus energy on other things than raising children, like someone on a mission.
- Someone may be proud to have achieved a high degree of control on his body and all basic instincts; staying away from sexual intercourse is a good way to express freedom of the spirit and demonstrate that it belongs to a different world.

Could all these reasons apply to the group advocating abstinence in Corinth? This topic has just been discussed above while presenting facets of the Corinthian Church. Nonetheless, we need to review it again in context of the question being raised. According to Hurd, most scholars “agree that there was an ascetic tendency or group in Corinth which was suspicious of all sexual relations”¹⁴⁰. Let us examine possible influences on the Corinthian community. For starters, based on this city cosmopolitan nature, one can conjecture three sources of influence: Hellenic philosophical thinking, Jewish Hellenic thinking, as well as Paul’s own preaching and life.

- a. “For the Greeks, writes Conzelmann, marriage is the normal thing to do. But there are also ascetic tendencies for which various reasons are given”¹⁴¹. And so he mentions Cynics for whom celibacy represents a higher degree¹⁴². We can venture some collusion between Cynic way of life and Christianity.
- b. Christianity having being founded from a Jewish baseline, the Jewish Hellenic ideas may have exerted a profound influence on Christian mindset in Corinth, at least among the elite. Those ideas were developed in the Jewish community of Alexandria under the leadership of Jewish author Philo¹⁴³, who tapped heavily into the sapiential tradition of the Jewish Bible.

One may wonder how far Philo’s ideas had been spread in Corinth? Murphy-O’Connor has an answer: “The obvious channel by which Philo’s philosophical framework entered the community was Apollos”¹⁴⁴. Apollos was originally from Alexandria before coming to Corinth and was well educated; however, some or many Corinthians could have distorted his

¹³⁹ H. Conzelmann, *op. cit.*, p. 115: “The question of the Corinthians must have been: Is sexual intercourse allowed (all)?”. See also J. C. Hurd, *op. cit.*, p. 161: “*ἄπτεισθαι* probably refers specifically to sexual intercourse rather than to marriage in general”.

¹⁴⁰ J. C. Hurd, *op. cit.*, p. 158.

¹⁴¹ *Op. cit.*, p. 115.

¹⁴² Conzelmann refers here to Epictetus (50 – 135) and his *Discourses*, 3.22.77 and Stobaeus (5th c. AD) who wrote: “*ἔτι οὐκ ἀγαθὸν τὸ γαμεῖν*” (it is not good to marry). On Cynic, Encyclopædia Britannica writes: “Cynic, any member of a Greek philosophical sect that flourished from the 4th century BC to well into Christian times and was distinguished more for its unconventional way of life than for any system of thought. Antisthenes, a disciple of Socrates, is considered to be the founder of the movement, but Diogenes of Sinope was its paradigm. He strove to destroy social conventions (including family life) as a way of returning to a “natural” life.”

¹⁴³ J. Dupont, Gnosis. *La connaissance religieuse dans les épîtres de saint Paul*. Louvain-Paris, Nauwelaerts- Gabalda, 1949; R. A. Horsley, in *Gnosis in Corinth 1 Cor 8:1-6*, *NTS* 27(1980)32-51; and *The Background of the Confessional Formula in Cor 8: 6*, *ZNW*, 69(1978)130-135; and *Consciousness and Freedom among the Corinthians: 1 Cor: 8-10*, *CBQ*, 40(1978)574-589; J. Murphy-O’Connor, *Paul. A Critical Life*, p. 280-282. On the other hand, Conzelmann refers often to W. Schmithals, *Die Gnosis in Korinth. Eine Unersuchung zu den Korintherbrief*. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1956. (Translated in English: *Gnosticism in Corinth. An Investigation of the Letters to the Corinthians*. Nashville: Abingdon, 1971).

¹⁴⁴ J. Murphy-O’Connor, *op. cit.*, p. 281.

teaching. This might explain why he left Corinth and followed Paul to Ephesus, “because he had become dismayed at the uses to which his teaching was being put”¹⁴⁵.

- c. Paul’s own teaching and life would be the third source of influence on the Corinthian community in two plausible ways.
- i. “Whether or not Jesus taught an apocalyptic eschatology, it is clear that Paul in his early preaching was enthusiastically apocalyptic”¹⁴⁶. A typical example is his preaching to the Thessalonians. Although its content is foreign to us, we do know that he needed afterward to clarify the nature of the eschatological signs that must precede the parousia, and did address some behaviour, like Christians who stop working (2 Thess 3:10)¹⁴⁷. In Corinth, Paul maintained his eschatological perspective by explaining the sequence of events on the last day (1 Cor 15:24-58). He truly believed that we will still be alive when the last day will come (1 Thess 4:15) “For this we declare to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will by no means precede those who have died” and so he could say: the appointed time has grown short; from now on, let even those who have wives be as though they had none (1 Cor 7:29). In that context, what is the point of starting a family or as Hurd put it:

“There was no need of a doctrine on the resurrection of believers, just as there was no need for a sexual ethic which envisioned the conception and raising of children in Christian homes”¹⁴⁸.

Moreover, the resurrection having launched a new life, in some ways the Kingdom was already present, and that some believed the institution of marriage has ceased, an option was to live like angels¹⁴⁹.

- ii. Last but not least, Paul would have influenced Corinthians by his own behaviour and values¹⁵⁰. We do not have evidence that he was married, so only two options are plausible: either he never married or he was a widower¹⁵¹. In both cases, he played a role model and could assertively say: “I wish that all were as I myself am” (1 Cor 7:7). Hurd supports the view that the ascetic position of a group of Corinthians is not due to external influence, but to Paul himself¹⁵². Hurd finds the basis of Paul’s open mind to abstinence in the conditional tolerance of Corinthians’ slogan (it is good for a man not to touch a woman) is supported by his personal marital status, and by his encouraging people be like himself so as to remaining single, and about the fact that abstinence was in order when devoting to prayer¹⁵³. We do not know whether this slogan was restricted to Corinth, although Paul has been preaching a very similar message in numerous cities; maybe Corinth was a uniquely large city with a wide range of cosmopolitan diversity like no other city. In as much as Hurd does not provide a satisfying explanation on why abstinence could be so dear to Paul’s heart and why he would support “spiritual marriage”¹⁵⁴, Paul does not articulate his tall value on abstinence, while his steadfast teaching sticks to marriage and all its constraints in the context where mission was urgent and the end of time was near.

In conclusion, how to explain that Corinthians asked this very question whether they were right in thinking that it is good for a man not to touch a woman? Probably all three factors elaborated: the ambient Cynic philosophy, the Jewish Hellenic ideas of Philo brought by Apollo as well as Paul’s preaching and way of life, weightily participated in designing an environment where such a question be formulated.

2. v. 2 Answer from Paul in the form of an exception

¹⁴⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 282.

¹⁴⁶ J. C. Hurd, *op. cit.*, p. 284.

¹⁴⁷ According to Murphy-O’Connor, *op. cit.*, p. 104-113, Paul wrote three letters to the Thessalonians, letter A (1 Thess 2:13 – 4:2), written from Athens, where he reacts to the good news brought by Timothy, letter B (1 Thess 1:1 – 2:12; 4:3 – 5:28), written from Corinth and where he needs to deal with issues concerning the Day of the Lord, and finally letter C (2 Thessalonians) where Paul finds imperative to demolish the belief that the parousia could be present while this evil age is still so clearly in evidence. It must be noted that Murphy-O’Connor considers 2 Thess to be authentic: “The arguments against the authenticity of 2 Thessalonians are so weak that it is preferable to accept the traditional ascription of the letter to Paul”, p. 111.

¹⁴⁸ J. C. Hurd, *op. cit.*, p. 284.

¹⁴⁹ J. C. Hurd: “Since the ‘spiritual’ couples at Corinth were not married as the world understood marriage, they were, therefore, living like angels. It is hard to overestimate the enthusiasm which appears to have existed in this early Christian community”. *Op. cit.*, p. 276-277.

¹⁵⁰ This point is stressed by J. C. Hurd, *op. cit.*

¹⁵¹ J. Jeremias (*Nochmals: War Paulus Witwer?*, *Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft und die Kunde der älteren Kirche*, 28(1929)321-323) believes he was a widower; likewise does Murphy-O’Connor, as we pointed out earlier.

¹⁵² Hurd, *op. cit.*, p. 277: “In tracing the course of the debate between Paul and the Corinthians we have found no evidence of outside influences at work in Corinth drawing the Corinthians away from Paul, introducing gnostic ideas, and allowing, or even encouraging, gross immorality. Instead we have found an earnest group of pioneers who felt themselves challenged by Paul’s first preaching into a strenuous, ascetic form of sexual behaviour”.

¹⁵³ Hurd, *op. cit.*, p. 275.

¹⁵⁴ Hurd’s view: “These spiritual marriages refer to the virgins (*παρθένοι*) in 1 Cor 7:25-38. According to this theory, unmarried members of the Corinthians community would have entered directly into ascetic relationships and, as in v.1, they would have promoted their case to Paul, who would have said: I agree. See *op. cit.*, p. 170-179”. “All in all, we conclude that the ascetical relationship which has arisen in the Corinthian church were probably marriages in every respect save marital intercourse and resulting parental responsibilities”, p. 180.

διὰ δὲ τὰς πορνείας ἕκαστος τὴν ἑαυτοῦ γυναῖκα ἐχέτω καὶ ἕκαστη τὸν ἴδιον ἄνδρα ἐχέτω (but because of promiscuities each [man] the woman of oneself should have and each [woman] their own husband should have).

διὰ δὲ (litt.: because then). On the one hand, according to our analysis of the previous verse, the particle δὲ is used to connect what precedes with what follows in a sequential but loosely manner, and is usually translated by “then”; although, a specific context could require another translation for it, like here where v. 2 qualifies v. 1, so δὲ should be translated with “but”. On the other hand, διὰ (because of, for the sake of, through, among, between, after), is a preposition that occurs everywhere in the Pauline corpus (290 times), and when it is followed by an accusative word, as it is the case here, it means “because of”. So Paul’s expression “But because of” qualifies what precedes and further supports the slogan in v. 1 as coming from the Corinthian letter. Quite a similar structure to 1 Cor 7 start-up was designed for the onset of 1 Cor 8.

1 Cor 7	1 Cor 8
1 Then about (Περὶ δὲ) things you have written, “it is good for a man not to be touching a woman”.	1 Then about (Περὶ δὲ) food sacrificed to idols: we know that “all of us possess knowledge.”
2 But (δὲ) because of promiscuities each [man] the woman of oneself should have and each [woman] their own husband should have	Knowledge puffs up, (δὲ) but love builds up.

Πορνείας is the feminine plural accusative of πορνεία (promiscuity, fornication, unchastity, prostitution)¹⁵⁵. There are a few words stemming from the same root: πορνεύω (prostitute herself, be or become a prostitute), πόρνη (harlot, prostitute), and πόρνος (promiscuous person). For now, let’s focus on πορνεία.

When searching the Old Testament for this word, we end up with different meanings, which could be grouped in the following way:

- Almost 75% of the time (34 out of 46), πορνεία describes Israel’s unfaithful behaviour to his God and to its truthful religious tradition. For example, from the LXX (Septuagint) “Hence, here is what the Lord God says: Because you have forgotten me and cast me behind your back, then bear the consequences of your lewdness and whorings (πορνεία)” (Ezek 23:35). As Kyle Harper puts it:

But in Biblical Hebrew *zanah* (fornication) acquired a metaphorical meaning that was to shape the destiny of the term in later discourse. From the time of Hosea, *zanah* came to mean idolatry (Hos 1:2; 4:12-13). The metaphor turns on the comparison of the covenantal relationship and the marital relationship. The visceral ideological charge of feminine unchastity was deployed to describe Israel’s lack of faith. The prophets accused Israel of being a “spiritual slut.” It is easy for a patriarchal society to see the guilt of a ‘fallen woman’; Hosea says, ‘You (male Israel) are that woman!’¹⁵⁶
- The word πορνεία occasionally means: crookedness, perversity, improper behaviour. For instance, referring to the financial success of Niniveh and its politics based on flattery and hypocrisy, Nahum writes: “Because of the countless debaucheries (πορνεία) of the prostitute (πόρνη), gracefully alluring, mistress of sorcery, who enslaves nations through her debaucheries, and peoples through her sorcery” (Nah 3:4). Additionally, “The improper behaviour (πορνεία) of a woman may be known in her haughty looks and eyelids” (Sir 26:9).
- In some instances, πορνεία bears a sexual connotation: debauchery, fornication, or lust. For instance, “and the house of Israel shall no more profane my holy name, they and their princes, by their fornication (πορνεία), or by the murders of their princes in the midst of them” (Ezek 43:7).
- In other instances, πορνεία alludes to prostitution like in: “And the Lord said to Hosea, Go, take to thyself a wife of whoredom (πορνεία), and children of whoredom (πορνεία): for the land will surely go a-whoring in departing from the Lord.” (Hos 1:2). According to Kyle Harper, the dissemination of this meaning dates back to the Second Temple Judaism:

Most remarkably, πορνεία in this period came to include prostitution as an illicit sexual outlet for Jewish men. Whereas the OT tolerates prostitution as an institution, in late Second Temple Judaism, prostitution became an illegitimate form of sexual practice, for male customers and female professionals alike¹⁵⁷.
- Only once do we find πορνεία pertaining to adultery, that is located in the sapiential tradition: “For first, she (the woman who has left her husband for another man) hath disobeyed the law of the most High; and secondly, she hath trespassed against her own husband; and thirdly, she hath played the whore in adultery (πορνεία), and brought children by another man” (Sir 23:23).

¹⁵⁵ Thorough analysis of πορνεία, *Porneia: The Making of a Christian Sexual Norm*, Kyle Harper. *JBL* 131(2011)363-383.

¹⁵⁶ Harper, *art. cit.*, p. 370.

¹⁵⁷ Harper, *art. cit.*, p. 371.

- Finally, there is this unique case where *πορνεία* denotes an illegal union (as specified in Leviticus 18:6-18): “Beware of all illegal union (*πορνεία*), my son, and chiefly take a wife of the seed of thy fathers, and take not a strange woman to wife, which is not of thy father’s tribe: for we are the children of the prophets, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob” (Tob 4:12a).

All in all, in the Old Testament, *πορνεία* relates only a few times to sexuality. Whereby in the prophetic tradition, it describes Israel estrangement from his true religious tradition, it elsewhere points to crooked behaviour. In summary, this word means abandonment of true self and enslavement in perverse behaviour.

However, when we search through the New Testament, more precisely in Gospels and Acts, this word would have a sexual connotation:

- In Matthew, there is the specific exception to Jesus teaching on adultery: “But I say to you that anyone who divorces his wife, except on the ground of unchastity (*πορνεία*), causes her to commit adultery; and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery” (Mt 5:32). The way this sentence is composed gives us a hint of a Jewish milieu where the initiative is only from a man; thus, *πορνεία* would refer to a sexual issue with the wife. The same exception appears later on in Mt 19:9¹⁵⁸.
- In Mark, *πορνεία* is associated with debauchery and lust, in a generic list of licentious and unacceptable behaviour: “For it is from within, from the human heart, that evil intentions come: fornication (*πορνεία*), theft, murder, adultery, avarice, wickedness, deceit, licentiousness, envy, slander, pride, folly” (Mk 7:21-22 || Mt 15:19).
- John is different, as *πορνεία* is in the mouth of Jesus’ Jewish adversaries when he challenged their status as sons of Abraham: “We have not been born sexual immorality (*πορνεία*); we have one father, God himself” (Jn 8:41). This brings us back to the symbolic meaning of *πορνεία* as conveyed by the prophetic tradition.
- The book of Acts refers to the Jerusalem’s meeting where a decision was made on not to circumcise the Gentiles, “but we should write to them to abstain only from things polluted by idols and from *πορνεία* and from whatever has been strangled and from blood” (Acts 15:20, repeated later in 15:29 and 21:25). On the one hand, a possible translation for *πορνεία* here would be “illegal union”; in reference to Lev 18:6-18: all the other prohibitions are basic Jewish laws; hence, *πορνεία* would also refer to a Jewish basic law¹⁵⁹. On the other hand, according to Kyle Harper, it is possible that Hellenistic Jews going to the prostitutes was legal and expected¹⁶⁰; then, Jerusalem may have proposed the Jewish sexual standard in contrast to what was considered licentious behaviour. In the latter case, *πορνεία* should be translated: “promiscuity”, but there is no decisive argument¹⁶¹.

What about Paul? If we focus on what are considered authentic letters¹⁶², then *πορνεία* only means sexual immorality in a generic way. We find five occurrences in 1 Cor, starting with 1 Cor 5:1 where Paul rebukes the community for accepting a sexual immorality case: “It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality (*πορνεία*) among you, and such sexual immorality (*πορνεία*) that is not found even among pagans; for a man has his father’s wife (*γυναϊκά τινα τοῦ πατρός*)”. What exactly is the issue? After the death of his father or his divorce, a man has probably married his stepmother¹⁶³. According to Conzelmann, the very expression *γυναϊκά τινα τοῦ πατρός* refers back to illegal unions prohibited by Leviticus 18:8¹⁶⁴. What is noteworthy here in Paul’s judgment is that the community is the temple of God (6:19), giving us a hint of how sexual immorality triggers a vigorous reaction from him. And we learn in 1 Cor 5:9-11 that he had already asked in a previous letter to avoid contact with sexually immoral persons (*πόρνος*) in the Christian community: “But now I am writing to you not to associate with anyone who bears the name of brother or sister who is sexually immoral (*πόρνος*) or greedy (*πλεονέκτης*), or is an idolater, reviler (*λοιδορός*), drunkard (*μέθυσος*), or robber. Do not even eat with such a one” (1 Cor 5:11). Striking here is that Paul not singling out only *πορνεία*, but an assortment of inappropriate conduct that was condemned by the sapiential

¹⁵⁸ On Matthew’s exception, Harper writes: “The exception clauses are related to Deut 24:1, where a man is allowed to divorce his wife if he discovers some indecency in her (LXX: *ἀσχημον πρᾶγμα*). In Greek, the language of *πορνεία* was never far from the language of shame which *ασχημον* evokes. It is sometimes asked why Matthew did not just use the word *μοιχεία*, but a plausible answer is that, in Greek, *μοιχεία* means violation, and the requisite passive voice does not imply female agency or moral failing. *Πορνεία*, by contrast, evokes the shame of the woman’s actions. It is used here in a way not far from the sense of the Hebrew ‘*hnz*’ as ‘to fall into dishonour’; *art. cit.*, p. 375-376.

¹⁵⁹ This is the translation of Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Acts of the Apostles: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary Commentary*. New York: Doubleday (Anchor Bible, 31), 1998, p. 557.

¹⁶⁰ Harper: “But for Hellenistic Jews, in a culture where sex with dishonored women, especially prostitutes and slaves, was legal and expected, the term condensed the cultural differences between the observers of the Torah and Gentile depravity”, *art. cit.*, p. 374-375.

¹⁶¹ Harper himself concludes: “In any case, the decree remains enigmatic, and we can say no more about *πορνεία* here than that it probably recognizes the fundamentally different sexual culture of the Greeks and asks Gentile converts to observe the stricter norms of Jewish sexuality. In other words, we need to invoke the strong rhetorical power of the word and its ability to condense the vast cultural differences between sexually pure “insiders” and sexually depraved “outsiders” to appreciate its unexpected centrality in the apostolic decree”, *art. cit.*, p. 376.

¹⁶² All letters, except Ephesians, Titus and 1 Timothy.

¹⁶³ Conzelmann: ‘A stable state is assumed by the verb *ἔχειν* (have) in the present tense’; *op. cit.*, p. 96.

¹⁶⁴ (LXX: *γυνή πατρός*, ‘father’s wife’) is an OT and rabbinical designation for a stepmother: Lev 18:8”; *op. cit.*, p. 96, note 25.

tradition¹⁶⁵, re-affirming Paul's Jewish moral background. Clearly, all those immoral activity instances cannot be tolerated of the Christian community, and in this context *πορνεία* can be any improper sexual behaviour¹⁶⁶.

The same topic is further described in 1 Cor 6¹⁶⁷, more specifically 1 Cor 6:12-20 where Paul would be dealing with Christians visiting prostitutes: "Do you not know that whoever is united to a prostitute (*πόρνη*) becomes one body with her? For it is said, 'The two shall be one flesh'" (1 Cor 6:16). We should not be surprised by this issue, taking into account that Corinth is a harbour city where prostitutes are found meeting travelers' needs¹⁶⁸. Who are those people Paul is dealing with? They are the ones proclaiming, "All things are lawful (*ἔξεστιν*) for me" (1 Cor 6:12), "Food is meant for the belly and the belly for food," and "God will destroy both one and the other" (1 Cor 6:13). On statement "it is good not to touch a woman" (1 Cor 7:1), we have already concluded that there might have been different seeds operating in Corinth: the Cynic Greek philosophy thrusting inner freedom; the Jewish Hellenic tradition coming from Philo of Alexandria emphasizing the importance of knowledge (*gnosis*), stating that only the wise and knowledgeable man is free and has the power to do anything, and therefore the body is irrelevant and unimportant; Paul's own preaching on the eschatological moment that is about to happen and as well on the Christian liberty from the law. From experience, we know that more than one factor can explain a situation, and often the same seed doesn't give the same result in everyone¹⁶⁹, one who *belongs* to this group and another who *belongs* to that group.

It is possible that "belly" (*κοιλία*), quoted by Paul in 1 Cor 6:13, came from Corinthian vocabulary, but in his response, he switches to "body" (*σῶμα,σώματος*). For Paul, the human body enables the person to have a relationship with other human beings, with God too, and based on one's faith in Jesus Christ, this body is destined for resurrection¹⁷⁰. Moreover, "Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ" (1 Cor 6:15). For Paul, the Christian community is the living body of Christ, filled with the Spirit, who continues his action in the world¹⁷¹, and he defines sanctity: "For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you abstain from sexual immorality" (1 Thess 4:3). For sanctity is not above all perfection, but being set apart to belong to the community of saints, those who belong to Christ. As Murphy O'Connor puts it:

The lifestyle of believers is qualified as 'sanctification' (1 Thess 4:3.7), which in the first place does not denote personal sanctity but rather having been 'set apart' by God, and thereby 'dedicated' to God. Christians are 'saints in virtue of a divine call'¹⁷².

In this context, there is no room for improper behaviour; should it be the case, it would be a blow to Christ. Everything else that Paul says on *πορνεία* stems from this insight, this is why he says: "Should I therefore take the members of Christ and make them members of a prostitute (*πόρνη*)? Never (*μη γένοιτο*)!" (1 Cor 6:15b); showing the strength of *μη γένοιτο* where *γένοιτο* is the optative (wishing, being wishful) middle voice of *γίνομαι*, it literally means "never may it be", and could be translated with uppercase: NEVER (EVER)¹⁷³!

We can now better grasp why Paul says: "Sexually immoral (*πόρνος*), idolaters, adulterers, effeminate (*μαλακός*), sex between men (*ἀρσενοκοίτης*)¹⁷⁴, thieves, the greedy, drunkards, revilers, swindlers — none of these will inherit the kingdom of God" (1 Cor 6:9b-10). How can this reflect the body of Christ? He exhorts the community: "Shun sexual immorality (*πορνεία*)!" (1 Cor 6:18); or "Put to death, therefore, whatever in you is earthly: sexual immorality (*πορνεία*), impurity, passion, evil desire, and greed (which is idolatry)" (Col 3:5). And his greatest fear is to find the brothers slipping back to

¹⁶⁵ On greedy (*πλεονέκτης*), Sir 14:9 "A covetous (*πλεονέκτης*) man's eye is not satisfied with his portion; and the iniquity of the wicked drieth up his soul"; on reviler (*λοιδορός*), Sir 23:8 "The sinner shall be left in his foolishness: both the evil speaker (*λοιδορός*) and the proud shall fall thereby" (see also Pr 25:24; 26:21; 27:15); on drunkard (*μέθυσος*), Sir 19:1 "A drunkard (*μέθυσος*) labourer shall not be rich: and he that contemns small things shall fall by little and little" (see also Sir 26:8; Prv 23:21; 26:9).

¹⁶⁶ According to Harper, in secular Greek "the *πόρνος* was the male prostitute. Paul clearly does not mean that the Corinthian community is harbouring male prostitutes, but rather that they are failing to expel men who indulge in the ordinary pleasures of life in a Greek city under the Roman Empire", *art. cit.*, p. 377.

¹⁶⁷ Will Deming, *The Unity of 1 Corinthians 5-6*, *JBL* 115(1996)289-312.

¹⁶⁸ Conzelmann: 'Corinth had a reputation for vice, especially cultivated by Athenians', referring to Plato, *The Republic*, 404d. See *op. cit.*, p. 12, note 89.

¹⁶⁹ Conzelmann, *op. cit.*, p. 108-109, stresses mainly one factor, Greek philosophical background, as he writes: "The statement (All things are lawful), like others of its kind, is so formal as to be suited for use in various speculative frameworks, e.g., Cynic, Stoic, Gnostic". For instance, he quotes Epictetus, *Discourses*, 4.1.1: "He is free who lives as he wills".

¹⁷⁰ Conzelmann, *op. cit.*, p. 111.

¹⁷¹ Murphy-O'Connor, in his *Paul. A Critical Life*, writes: "In this insight we have the seeds of two further developments in Paul's Christology, the giving of the name 'Christ' to this new reality the believing community (e.g. 1 Cor. 6:15), and the clarification of its nature as 'the body of Christ'", p. 205.

¹⁷² J. Murphy-O'Connor, *A Critical Life*, p. 125. "The alternative to 'sanctification' is described as *porneia* (v. 3) and *akatharsia* (v. 7). The latter means 'uncleanness' and is the antithesis of 'sanctification' used in the cultic sense just defined".

¹⁷³ This expression is used elsewhere by Paul in Galatians and Romans reacting to something unthinkable or unbearable: "is Christ then a servant of sin? Certainly not!" (Gal 2:17); "Is the law then opposed to the promises of God? Certainly not!" (Gal 3:21); "Will their faithlessness nullify the faithfulness of God? By no means! ... God is unjust to inflict wrath on us? ... By no means!" (Rom 3:3b-6a); "Do we then overthrow the law by this faith? By no means!" (Rom 3:31); "Should we continue in sin in order that grace may abound? By no means!" (Rom 6:1b-2a); "Should we sin because we are not under law but under grace? By no means!" (Rom 6:15); "That the law is sin? By no means!" (Rom 7:7b); "Did what is good, then, bring death to me? By no means!" (Rom 7:13a); "Is there injustice on God's part? By no means!" (Rom 9:14); "I ask, then, has God rejected his people? By no means!" (Rom 11:1a); "So I ask, have they stumbled so as to fall? By no means!" (Rom 11:11).

¹⁷⁴ We are giving the Greek word for all terms that refer to sexual immorality according to Jewish morality.

πορνεία: “I fear that when I come again, my God may humble me before you, and that I may have to mourn over many who previously sinned and have not repented of the impurity, sexual immorality (*πορνεία*), and licentiousness that they have practiced” (2 Cor 12:21).

At this point, let us revert to our v. 2: “but because of promiscuities (*πορνεία*) each [man] the woman of oneself should have and each [woman] their own husband should have”. Further to our most recent findings, sexual immorality is not a benign matter; moreover, it is a blow to Christ and even a damage to the community of saints. Most unfortunately, *πορνεία* in Corinth was a factual reality in which context, it sounded almost mandatory that each man had his wife, and each woman had his husband. While its citizens were striving to avoid *πορνεία*, marriage contributed to building the body of Christ, and Paul’s discarding of sexual asceticism assisted in constructing a pathway to salvation¹⁷⁵.

ἔχέτω is the present active imperative, 3rd singular, of the verb: *ἔχω* (have). This is a very frequent verb (164 times in the Pauline corpus) that occurs 49 times in 1 Corinthians. But in the context of v. 2, it has a specific meaning: marriage, let each [man] have (*ἔχω*) his own wife and let each [woman] have (*ἔχω*) her own husband. This is confirmed by other parts of the letter.

- It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and of a kind that is not found even among pagans, to the point for a man to have (*ἔχω*) his father’s wife (5:1).
- To the rest I say — I and not the Lord — that if any believer has (*ἔχω*) a wife who is an unbeliever, and she consents to live with him, he should not divorce her (7:12).
- And if any woman has (*ἔχω*) a husband who is an unbeliever, and he consents to live with her, she should not divorce him (7:13).
- I mean brothers and sisters, the appointed time has grown short; from now on, let even those who have (*ἔχω*) wives be as though they had (*ἔχω*) none (7:29).

When talking about the danger of *πορνεία* and the solution of marriage, is Paul referring here to married couples whom he advises to have normal sexual relationship, or is he referring to single persons in general whom he recommends marriage? Based on coming verses, Paul leans toward the former; nonetheless, his guiding principle is phrased such that it can apply to both. This is also Conzelmann’s position¹⁷⁶.

ἄνδρα is the masculine accusative singular of *ἄνθρωπος* which means: man (as opposed to woman) or husband. It can be found 55 times in the Pauline corpus, mostly in 1 Corinthians (32 times), and more specifically in chapter 7 (16 times) where he discusses marital relationship and celibacy, and chapter 11 (14 times) in Church gathering, he talks over woman behaviour and her hair gears. If we restrict our analysis to what comes from Paul’s pen¹⁷⁷ in the whole Pauline corpus, we find that *ἄνθρωπος* always shows up in relationship with woman, except once where it is presented in contrast with a child (1 Cor 13:11) “When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child; when I became a man (*ἄνθρωπος*), I put an end to childish ways”. Notwithstanding our analysis of the word *γυνή* (woman) to whom Paul gives in Christ equal rights to man, there is a reality that Paul has been living with: that the cosmology and culture of his time whence there is a hierarchy from God to women, through angels and men, where a man has authority over his wife, and that he should not wear anything on his head, being the image of God, while a woman should, as her being the image of man, without being mannish. Even if, according to the Bible, man precedes woman in the chronology of creation, Paul is careful to add that man is being born from woman, and he stipulates in 2 Cor 11:2

“Indeed I am jealous for you with a divine jealousy, for I betrothed you to one husband (*ἄνθρωπος*), to present you as a pure virgin to Christ.”

Here we have the seeds of wife-husband relationship being the image of Church-Christ relationship, where Christ prestigious role is being played by a biological man. Nevertheless, if we focus on the gist of Paul’s life, we find that the framework of his statement is the intimate communion even almost fusion being experienced with Christ, that he expects his Corinthian community members, whether being a male or female, to live likewise as all are one in Christ; this is key to understand Paul’s vision.

3. v. 3 Answer extended with husband duties

τῇ γυναικὶ ὁ ἄνθρωπος τὴν ὀφειλὴν ἀποδιδότω, ὁμοίως δὲ καὶ ἡ γυνὴ τῷ ἀνδρὶ (The husband should render what is due to the wife, but similarly also the woman to the husband)

ὀφειλὴν is the feminine accusative singular of *ὀφειλή* (what is due, debt), is a rarisime word in the whole Bible, which is only used twice more in Rom 13:7 (Paul asks his audience to pay the tax they owe) and Mt 18:32 (the parable of the debtor where a master forgives all the debt of his servant). Additionally, we notice that *ὀφειλή* has a synonym with the same meaning, *ὀφειλήμα*, that is also rare, found only in: Rom 4:4 (the salary is something that is owed, it is different from grace); Mt 6:12 (the Lord’s prayer: Forgive us our debts); Deut 24:10 (a case where someone is lending a loan to a neighbour); LXX 1 Esd 3:20

¹⁷⁵ Conzelmann, *op. cit.*, p. 116.

¹⁷⁶ “It can be asked whether Paul has in mind a possible entry into matrimony or the proper conduct within existing marriages. But Paul is not yet thinking of this alternative here, His observations are in the first instance of a general kind”, *op. cit.*, p. 116.

¹⁷⁷ As a reminder, we are considering letters to Ephesians, Titus and 1 Timothy as not coming from Paul’s pen. Moreover, we have demonstrated earlier on that 1 Cor 14: 34-35 is an interpolation and not from Paul.

(wine makes people forget their sorrow and their debt); and 1 Macc 15:8 (the free Jerusalem will stop giving what is owed to the king). Overall, we are in a context of almost legal obligation or justice, reinforced by the verb *ἀποδίδωμι*, the present active imperative form of *ἀποδίδωμι* (give back, render), 3rd person singular. For instance, Paul writes to the Romans: “For he (God) will repay (*ἀποδίδωμι*) according to each one’s deeds” (2:6), and: “Pay (*ἀποδίδωμι*) to all what is due (*ὀφειλή*) them — taxes to whom taxes are due, revenue to whom revenue is due, respect to whom respect is due, honor to whom honor is due” (13:7).

Paul’s teaching message between a wife and husband is set in either a mercantile context of loan and debtor, or a political context of authority and taxes. Hence, some translators use “obligation” to translate *ὀφειλή*. How could a marital relationship be presented as an obligation or a debt? And how could Paul’s writing on true love and communion with Christ degrade man and woman relationship to the same level as taxes? Looking into a parent word, the verb *ὀφείλω* (to owe, to be bound to render, to be liable to, to be obliged to do, it behoves), may shed some light.

This verb occurs 18 times in the Pauline corpus.

- Firstly, it denotes the necessity of life or the nature of things (1 Cor 5:10) “(I didn’t mean) all the immoral of this world, or the greedy and robbers, or idolaters, since you would then need (*ὀφείλω*) to go out of the world”; similarly present in 7:36; 9:10; 11:7; 11:10; 2 Cor 12:14.
- Secondly, it refers to debt in the sense that we need to pay back what we have received (2 Thess 1:3 “We must (*ὀφείλω*) always give thanks to God for you, brothers and sisters, as is right, because your faith is growing abundantly, and the love of everyone of you for one another is increasing”; similarly present in 2:13; Rm 15:27; Philem 18);
- Thirdly, there are unique cases where it describes a pressing demand (2 Cor 12:11 “I have been a fool! You forced (*ὀφείλω*) me to it. Indeed you should have been the ones commending me”),
- Fourthly, it describes gaining something or benefiting from something (1 Cor 13:3 “If I give away all my possessions, and if I hand over my body so that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain (*ὀφείλω*) nothing”).

What indeed matters to us are cases where *ὀφείλω* is tied to the gift of the Spirit:

- “(The Spirit dwells in you)... So then, brothers and sisters, we are debtors (*ὀφείλω*), not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh” (Rom 8:12)
- “Owe (*ὀφείλω*) no one anything, except to love one another; for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law” (Rom 13:8)
- “We who are strong ought (*ὀφείλω*) to put up with the failings of the weak, and not to please ourselves” (Rom 15:1)

Further to these discoveries on *ὀφείλω* in a Christian context, one when describing human relationship as “debt” relates to paying back what one has received in marital relationship, and more specifically the Spirit of Christ. The apostle who preaches Christian freedom cannot all of a sudden reduce marital relationship to obligation and slavery. Not only have we shown earlier Paul’s keenness on equal rights for both men and woman, despite the legal tone of the word “what is due”, we also ought to read v. 2 in the same context as Rom 13:8 (Owe (*ὀφείλω*) no-one anything, except to love one another), including sexual intercourse.

Next, we need to bring up the adverb *ὁμοίως* (similarly, likewise, in like fashion, of the same rank) that is used only four times by Paul in his letters; here in v. 3, also in v. 4, *ὁμοίως* stresses the fact that man and woman are equal and ought to be treated in the same fashion. In 1 Corinthians 7:22, Paul uses the same approach by saying that a slave is a freed person in Christ, and similarly (*ὁμοίως*) a free man is a slave of Christ. Additionally, in Romans 1:27, after describing how women in a pagan world degraded themselves through homosexuality, he adds: “and in the same way (*ὁμοίως*) also the men, giving up natural intercourse with women, were consumed with passion for one another”. So *ὁμοίως* is a way to put two entities on the same level.

4. v. 4 Answer extended with the reason of husband duties

ἡ γυνὴ τοῦ ἰδίου σώματος οὐκ ἐξουσιάζει ἀλλ’ ὁ ἀνὴρ, ὁμοίως δὲ καὶ ὁ ἀνὴρ τοῦ ἰδίου σώματος οὐκ ἐξουσιάζει ἀλλ’ ἡ γυνὴ (the woman does not have authority on her own body but the husband, but similarly also the husband does not have authority of his own body but the woman).

How should we understand “own body” and “have authority”? Does Paul mean that a spouse is the owner of the partner’s body and can do whatever he or she pleases? Before trying to quickly answer both questions, we need to properly analyze *σώματος* and *ἐξουσιάζει*.

Σώματος is the neutral genitive singular of *σῶμα*: body, person, human being, corporal substance. When looking at the Jewish background of this word, we find that it is the translation of (*bāsār*), which means: body (Ex 30:32; Job 7:5); skin (Ex 4:7; Job 4:15); meat (Num 11:4.13.18), consanguinity or kinship (Ex 2:23; 37:27; Judg 9:2; 2 Sam 5:1)¹⁷⁸. Additionally, the Septuagint translators used two different words to translate *bāsār*: *σὰρξ* (flesh), six times out of seven, and *σῶμα* (body)¹⁷⁹. In light of

¹⁷⁸ Jean-Pierre Prévost, *Basar*, in *Nouveau vocabulaire biblique*. Paris-Montréal : Bayard-Médiaspaul, 2004, p. 101.

¹⁷⁹ André Myre, Jean-Yves Thériault, *Sarx- Sōma*, in *Nouveau vocabulaire biblique*, p. 473.

this, to fully understand the background of Paul's writing, we need to analyze both *σάρξ* and *σῶμα*, which are equally used 91 times in the Pauline corpus, and even sometimes synonymous.

Let us begin with *σάρξ*, which means: flesh, body, pieces of flesh or skin, pulpy substance of fruit, or flesh that is seat of affections and lusts¹⁸⁰. In the Old Testament, it usually is interpreted as the entire living human being. But when we scan the whole Pauline corpus, we find nuances of the word that can be grouped in five categories presented here in frequency descending order¹⁸¹.

- i. it may refer to the human being with its constraints as a creature, short-sighted in his decisions, submitted to miscellaneous drives and passions, often selfish and self-centered.
- ii. it may refer to the human being as part of history and of a socio-economic reality, submitted to the plight of a daily life.
- iii. it may refer to a biological reality, sharing similar attributes with animals.
- iv. it may refer to the whole human being and be substituted by the word "person".
- v. it may describe a physical matter, the fact that things are made of stuff or material.

A few examples will clarify these categories.

- i. *σάρξ* as a raw creature with its limits, passions, selfishness.

In this context, Paul often opposes flesh and Spirit: "For what the flesh (*σάρξ*) desires is opposed to the Spirit, and what the Spirit desires is opposed to the flesh (*σάρξ*); for these are opposed to each other, to prevent you from doing what you want. ... Now the works of the flesh are clear: fornication, purity, licentiousness" (Gal 5:17-19). Even Paul himself needs to scrutinize the motive for his decisions in case they come from the flesh: "Was I vacillating when I wanted to do this? Do I make my plans according to the flesh (*σάρξ*), ready to say "Yes, yes" and "No, no" at the same time?" (2 Cor 1:17). This usage of *σάρξ* is the most frequent in Paul's writings, since Christian conversion aims at leaving behind this lifestyle.

- ii. *σάρξ* as the characteristic of human being in being part of history with its socio-economic condition, and tensions of daily life.

Paul uses this word to talk about how some people are perceived in society: "Consider your own call, brothers and sisters: not many of you were wise according to the flesh (*σάρξ*), not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth" (1 Cor 1:26). This describes the human condition that no one can escape, which can become harder per Paul's writing to the Corinthians: "Yet those who marry will experience distress in their flesh (*σάρξ*), and I would spare you that" (1 Cor 7:28). Paul also mentions some scars: "For even when we came into Macedonia, our flesh (*σάρξ*) had no rest, but we were afflicted in every way — disputes without and fears within" (2 Cor 7:5). So, there is nothing good or bad while living in the flesh, it is part and parcel of our human condition.

- iii. *σάρξ* as a biological reality where we share similar attributes with animals.

There are three typical situations where Paul uses *σάρξ* in this sense.

First, it refers to circumcision and is related to the skin of a body part: "For it is we who are the circumcision, who worship in the Spirit of God and boast in Christ Jesus and have no confidence in the flesh (*σάρξ*) — even though I, too, have reason for confidence in the flesh (*σάρξ*)" (Ph 3:3-4).

Second, it refers to the biological body that sometimes is sick, as it happened to Paul himself while in Galatia: "You know that it was because of a weakness in the flesh (*σάρξ*) that I first announced the gospel to you" (Gal 4:13).

Third, it refers to blood relationship or kinship, or in term of modern words - similarity of genes: "What then are we to say was gained by Abraham, our ancestor according to the flesh (*σάρξ*)?" (Rom 4:1). Likewise here, there is nothing good or bad with respect to flesh in this sense.

- iv. *σάρξ* defines the whole human being and could be replaced by the word "person", and is often synonymous to *σῶμα*.

Paul's usage of this term signifies his referencing to everyone, and so uses the attribute "all": "God chose what is low and despised in the world, things that are not, to reduce to nothing things that are, so that no flesh (*σάρξ*) might boast in the presence of God" (1 Cor 1:28-29). This idea of single soul or human being is also present in Paul quoting Genesis: "Do you not know that whoever is united to a prostitute becomes one body (*σῶμα*) with her? For it is said, 'The two shall be one flesh (*σάρξ*)'" (1 Cor 6:16). The latter is a typical example where *σῶμα* and *σάρξ* are synonymous. Here *σάρξ* is the core of a human being that defines the true self, and its demise is the death of the person: "you are to hand this man over to

¹⁸⁰ Henry George Liddell, Robert Scott, [A Greek-English Lexicon](#).

¹⁸¹ Each of these categories, though not mutually exclusive from one another, has its own value which is to help us pinpoint different emphasises of Paul's thinking.

Satan for the destruction of the flesh (σάρξ), so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord” (1 Cor 5:5)¹⁸². This meaning goes back to the Old Testament, learned by Paul as a young Jewish man, when *bāsār* points to the whole person.

- v. σάρξ refers to the physical matter, that things are made of stuff or material.

This meaning is close to the biological aspect of creation. But here the focus is more on the generic fact of entities with a body that shows different aspects and forces them to be in a single place at a time. For instance, talking about resurrection and looking for examples in the universe, he says: “Not all flesh is alike, but there is one flesh for human beings, another flesh for animals, another flesh for birds, and another for fish” (1 Cor 15:39). All of these share the physical reality of being entities that have color and different texture, and are physically located, so that Paul could say: “For though I am absent in flesh, yet I am with you in spirit, and I rejoice to see your morale and the firmness of your faith in Christ” (Col 2:5). Here, this meaning is synonymous to body σῶμα.

Let us now tackle σῶμα. After our analysis of σάρξ, we should expect some similarities since both are at times synonymous, yet at other times fairly different. We have grouped the 91 occurrences in four categories in frequency descending order.

- a. Being at times the case with σάρξ, σῶμα (body) also means the whole of the person, the entity who can have a relationship with others and with Christ, impacting the whole person as Paul writes about the prostitutes: “The body is meant not for fornication but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body (σῶμα)” (1 Cor 6:13). Paul goes further to stipulate that the body is a temple of the Holy Spirit: “Or do you not know that your body (σῶμα) is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, which you have from God, and that you are not your own?” (1 Cor 6:19). Then, talking about the body of Christ, he refers to the whole being of Christ: “The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a sharing in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a sharing in the body (σῶμα) of Christ?” (1 Cor 10:16).
- b. Similarly to a specific case for σάρξ, σῶμα could denote the biological body that has limbs: “For just as the body (σῶμα) is one and has many members, and all the members of the body (σῶμα), though many, are one body (σῶμα), so it is with Christ” (1 Cor 12:12), which body has attributes that can be strong or weak: “For they say, ‘His letters are weighty and strong, but his bodily (σῶμα) presence is weak, and his speech contemptible’” (2 Cor 10:10). This biological body is the focus of some Christians who willingly fast in order to practise a Jewish tradition: “These have indeed an appearance of wisdom in promoting self-imposed piety, humility, and severe treatment of the body (σῶμα), but they are of no value in checking self indulgence” (Col 2:23).
- c. Conspicuous with Paul, is his reference to σῶμα with the Church, described as the body of Christ. J. Murphy-O’Connor proposes the following, on how Paul got this idea:

It is much more likely that he was jolted into thinking of the church as a ‘body’ by reflecting on the most memorable feature of the Asclepius temples scattered throughout the eastern Mediterranean, namely ceramic representations of parts of the body which had been cured. The recommendation of Vitruvius that such temples be sited only in areas with clean air and pure water made them favourite places of recreation, and there is no reason to think that Paul did not occasionally visit those places. The sight of legs which were not legs, brought Paul to the realization that a leg was truly a leg only when part of a body. Believers, he inferred, were truly ‘alive’ only when they ‘belonged’ to Christ as his members (Col. 2: 6, 13; 3: 4). The ‘death’ of egocentric isolation has been replaced by the ‘life’ of shared existence.

When prolonged, this same line of thought gives us, ‘holding fast to the head, from whom the whole body, nourished and knit together through its joints and ligaments, grows with a growth that is from God’ (Col. 2: 19). This use of ‘head’ in the sense of ‘source’ is better attested than the alternative meaning ‘superior’, which is certainly the sense in Colossians 2: 10. The vision of the church as the Body of Christ also appears in later letters¹⁸³

Expanding on this train of thought gives us: ‘holding fast to the head, from whom the whole body, nourished and knit together through its joints and ligaments, grows with a growth that is from God’ (Col. 2: 19); ‘head’ in the sense of ‘source’ is better attested than the alternative ‘superior’ plausible denotation in Col. 2:10 ‘who is the head of every ruler and authority’.

However, in Paul’s letters, this idea first stems from the fact that all Christians eat the same bread, the body of Christ: “Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body (σῶμα), for we all partake of the one bread” (1 Cor 10:17). Focussing on the same idea, is the existence of one Spirit: “For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body

¹⁸² Conzelmann, *op. cit.*, p.97, note 35, on 1 Cor 5:5: “This is in accordance with the terminology of 15:3ff. σάρξ, “flesh”, is synonymous in both passage with σῶμα, “body”.

¹⁸³ Murphy-O’Connor, *op. cit.*, p. 245-246. This is an interesting idea, but hard to confirm. It is clear that he could have hardly avoid seeing the impact of Asclepius temple in Greek’s life, as of today it is hard to ignore the Oratoire St-Joseph or the basilica of Sainte-Anne-de-Beaupré. And there is an obvious parallel between bringing to life all limbs through healing so they form a healthy body and the Spirit healing everyone so they could constitute an unique body, that is Christ.

(σῶμα) — Jews or Greeks, slaves or free — and we were all made to drink of one Spirit” (1 Cor 12:13). Altogether, Christians form the body of Christ: “Now you are the body (σῶμα) of Christ and individually members of it” (1 Cor 12:27), and this body keeps growing: “the head (Christ), from whom the whole body (σῶμα), nourished and held together by its ligaments and sinews, grows with a growth that is from God” (Col 2:19).

- d. As in the case with σὰρξ, σῶμα likewise refers to the very fabric of the universe, the physical entity that takes different forms depending on the object: “And as for what you sow, you do not sow the body (σῶμα) that is to be, but a bare seed, perhaps of wheat or of some other grain. But God gives it a body (σῶμα) as he has chosen, and to each kind of seed its own body (σῶμα)” (1 Cor 15:37-38). Moreover, the term body applies to earthly and heavenly realities: “There are both heavenly bodies (σῶμα) and earthly bodies (σῶμα), but the glory of the heavenly is one thing, and that of the earthly is another” (1 Cor 15:40). Paul uses these differences to explain what is a human body on earth, and what is a human body in heaven: “It is sown a physical body (σῶμα), it is raised a spiritual one. If there is a physical body (σῶμα), there is also a spiritual body (σῶμα)” (1 Cor 15:44).

What are we to conclude on our analysis of σῶμα and σὰρξ ?

They often are synonymous in Paul’s writings, covering the same ground in three ways:

- 1) in some cases, they both refer to a person’s core as a unique subject, and are synonymous of person.
- 2) in other cases, they both refer to the biological body and its attributes, namely to the skin with circumcision or kinship with blood or to its health status on the one hand, and to its different limbs or its strength or its weakness or its suffering through fasting on the other hand.
- 3) in yet other cases, they both refer to the very fabric of the universe and are like clothes dressing a physical substance; on the one hand: animals, birds, and fishes; on the other hand: wheat, heavenly entities, physical human being, and spiritual human being. However, σὰρξ has two meanings concealed from σῶμα, namely a link to the historical and socio-economic environment of a person, and a reference to the human character of being limited, short-sighted, selfish, driven by passions, or struggling with the Spirit. In contrast, σῶμα has sometimes the peculiar connotation of referring to the Church, the Christian community as the body of Christ.

Having path-cycled a long way from the front line, we now need moonwalking to our v. 4 original question: When Paul says that wife and husband do not have authority on their own body, what does he mean by “body”? We have seen five meanings of body, which one is the best fit for v.4? The context eliminates any reference to the body of Christ, likewise to the physical fabric of the universe. Do we have here a reference to the biological body? Each time Paul refers to the biological body, he talks about one of its attributes: its limbs (1 Cor 12:12), its pain (1 Cor 9:27), its age (Rom 4:19), its weakness (2 Cor 10:10). There is nothing here referring to a body attribute. So we are left with body referring to a whole human being, a person. This meaning is confirmed by 1 Cor 6:16: “Do you not know that whoever is united to a prostitute becomes one body (σῶμα) with her? For it is said, ‘The two shall be one flesh (σὰρξ)’”. By quoting Gen 2:24 and the fact that two persons become a single one, and mapping σὰρξ to σῶμα, it clarifies the use of σῶμα as the whole human being, the person capable of relationship. Therefore, in v. 4, the authority is on the whole person, wife on husband, husband on wife. We now need to understand what Paul means by “authority”.

ἐξουσιάζει is the present active indicative 3rd singular of the verb ἐξουσιάζω (to exercise authority over, to master, to bring under authority). Unfortunately, outside of v. 4, this verb only occurs in 1 Cor 6:12 (“All things are lawful for me,” but not all things are beneficial. “All things are lawful for me,” but I will not be dominated (ἐξουσιάζω) by anything). The latter meaning is not really positive, since it alludes to slavery under some passions. This verb (ἐξουσιάζω) is also found in Luke, Lk 22:25 (But Jesus said to them, “The kings of the Gentiles lord it over them; and those in authority over (ἐξουσιάζω) them are called benefactors”), who denotes a behaviour that the disciples should avoid. In the Septuagint, both books of Ecclesiastes and Nehemiah use (ἐξουσιάζω) too: In (Eccl 5:18), its meaning entails the capability of doing something; in (Eccl 8:4), power and strength of a ruler; in (Eccl 9:17), it refers to a political ruler; in (Nehemiah 9:17), “Its rich yield goes to the kings whom you have set over us because of our sins; they have power (ἐξουσιάζω) also over our bodies (σῶμα) and over our livestock at their pleasure, and we are in great distress”. This Nehemiah 9:17, despite the similarities of words, does not help us in our understanding of Paul, since it negatively refers to the power of rulers whose authority is consequential to people’s sin. It is most unlikely that Paul had a negative view of authority when referring to married couples. So let’s see if we can gain more insights by looking at the related substantive: ἐξουσία (power, authority to do a thing, control, ruler, body of magistrates, office, magistracy).

ἐξουσία recurs 27 times in the Pauline corpus featuring numerous connotations of this word. Let’s first start with meanings that can be easily discarded as misfit to marital relationship:

- “Category of angels or celestial power” (1 Cor 15:24) “Then comes the end, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father, after he has destroyed every ruler and every authority (ἐξουσία) and power”.
- “Rulers in this world” (Rom 13:1) “Let every person be subject to the governing authorities (ἐξουσία); for there is no authority (ἐξουσία) except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God”.
- “Authorization or freedom to do something”, brought up by Paul when referring to those who eat meat that is offered to idols (1 Cor 8:9) “But take care that this liberty (ἐξουσία) of yours does not somehow become a stumbling block to the weak”.

- “Authority of the author over a piece of work” (Rom 9:21) “Has the potter no right (*ἐξουσία*) over the clay, to make out of the same lump one object for special use and another for ordinary use?”.
- “Cosmic power of evil” (Col 1:13) “He has rescued us from the power (*ἐξουσία*) of darkness and transferred us into the kingdom of his beloved Son”.

Therefore, we are left with four plausible meanings.

- “To exercise control on something or someone” (1 Cor 7:37 “But if someone stands firm in his resolve, being under no necessity but having his own will under control (*ἐξουσία*), and has determined in his own mind to keep her as his fiancée, he will do well”).
- “To be under the authority of someone in a hierarchy” (1 Cor 11:10 “For this reason a woman ought to have a symbol of authority (*ἐξουσία*) on her head, because of the angels”).
- “A civil right, a legal right on something or someone” when Paul refers to his right to be paid back for his missionary work (1 Cor 9:12 “If others share this rightful claim (*ἐξουσία*) on you, do we not deserve more? Nevertheless, we have not made use of this right (*ἐξουσία*), but we endure anything rather than put an obstacle in the way of the gospel of Christ”).
- “The authority of an educator or a teacher” when Paul refers to his own role (2 Cor 10:8 “Now, even if I boast a little too much of our authority (*ἐξουσία*), which the Lord gave for building you up and not for tearing you down, I will not be ashamed of it”).

Let’s examine each of these meanings, keeping in mind that Paul asserts that wife and husband together become one person, referring to Gen 2:24.

- “To exercise control over something or someone”. So this would mean that wife would exercise control over husband, and husband over wife. If both exercise control, there is really no control, as one control nullifies the other control. Therefore, Paul would have said something meaningless.
- “To be under the authority of someone in a hierarchy”. This would make sense if it was a one-way relationship, for instance the authority of a husband over wife, or the other way around. But it cannot be both at the same time, Paul could not have said something impossible.
- “A civil right, a legal right on something or someone”. This meaning supports a two-way relationship, and in modern terms we can say that spouses have legal rights on one another. We have already analyzed *ὀφείλω* (owing right) and have referred to Rom 13:8 (Owe (*ὀφείλω*) no-one anything, except to love one another); above all, what matters for him is love. Since Paul avoids presenting human relationship in terms of rights, what type of right would he be referring to?
- “The authority of an educator or a teacher”. This is how Paul sees his own authority, based on a call from God, and the goal of this authority is to build up and edify others while demonstrating responsibility. Could it be that, in v. 4, Paul views husband having the authority of a teacher with respect to his wife, and a wife having the authority of a teacher with respect to her husband? This type of authority is bi-directional with a responsibility of one caring for the other, even though it is no solid proof that this is what best fit Paul’s vision on human relationship. We just need to skip to chapter 12 where he talks about roles and responsibilities in a community using the image of a body and its different members. Moreover, we can find a corroboration of our insight when Paul writes about mixed couples: “For the husband the unbeliever has been made holy through the wife and the wife the unbeliever has been made holy through the brother” (1 Cor 7:14). Although we are not here pre-empting v. 14 analysis, nonetheless could we not foresee the impact or influence of one partner on the other, which is also a responsibility? Therefore, it is most likely what is meant by authority in v. 4.

Recapping our analysis of v. 4: after asking spouses to meet each other needs in v. 3, Paul now provides a rationale for his request, that they have become one person, and each one is responsible to care for and influence the other.

5. v. 5 Possible exception

μη ἀποστερεῖτε ἀλλήλους, εἰ μήτι ἂν ἐκ συμφώνου πρὸς καιρόν, ἵνα σχολάσητε τῇ προσευχῇ καὶ πάλιν ἐπὶ τὸ αὐτὸ ᾄτε, ἵνα μη πειράζη ὑμᾶς ὁ σατανᾶς διὰ τὴν ἀκρασίαν ὑμῶν (Do not deprive one another, unless perhaps eventually from an agreement for a time, in order to devote yourself to prayer and again be together, in order for the Satan not to tempt you through the debility of yours).

Let’s analyze each member of the sentence, starting with *μη ἀποστερεῖτε ἀλλήλους* (Do not deprive one another). The verb *ἀποστερεῖτε* is the present active imperative 2nd person plural of the verb *ἀποστερέω* (defraud, rob, be deprived of, detach, withdraw oneself from). In the Pauline corpus, it only recurs four times, and specifically thrice in 1 Corinthians (including this v.5); both other occurrences are in v.7 and v.8 of 1 Cor 6:7-8 where Paul finds unacceptable that Christians go to court challenging each other and add that it would be preferable to be defrauded (*ἀποστερέω*) than defrauding (*ἀποστερέω*) others¹⁸⁴. Elsewhere in the New Testament, there are only two illustrations: in Mark 10:19, where Jesus asserts not to defraud others, and in James 5:4, where the author shouts at rich men who have defrauded laborers of their wages. Therefore, all of these 5 concurrences refer to a context of fraud. While in the Septuagint, the majority of *ἀποστερέω* instances come from Ben Sirah, where this verb refers to depriving the poor of their living (Sir 4:1), or the borrower depriving the creditor of his money (Sir 29:6), or the evil on depriving a needy of bread (Sir 34:21). However, the closest parallel to our v.5 is found in Ex 21:10 (And if a man take another wife to himself, he shall not deprive her (the first wife) of necessaries and

¹⁸⁴ The other reference is 1 Tim 6:5, not from Paul’s hand, where the author talks of men “bereft of the truth”.

her apparel, and her companionship), which also relates to a human relationship deprivation, on the very same train-of-thought as Paul's, being a vital facet of marriage for him.

εἰ μὴτι ἂν ἐκ συμφώνου πρὸς καιρόν (unless perhaps eventually from an agreement for a time). This expression *εἰ μὴτι ἂν* (unless perhaps eventually) is unique in the whole Bible. First, the conjunction *εἰ*, usually translated by "if", introduces a conditional sentence and is quite frequent in the Pauline corpus (202 times). Then, *μὴτι* is a particle that usually introduces a question in a negative form, like "is it not?", only found five times in the Pauline corpus, all of which clustered in 1 Cor and 2 Cor: (for instance, 2 Cor 12:18 "Titus did not take advantage of you, did he (*μὴτι*)?"). Now, tandem words '*εἰ μὴτι*', usually translated with "unless perhaps", do occur in the Pauline corpus only in 2 Cor 13:5b (Do you not realize that Jesus Christ is in you? — unless perhaps (*εἰ μὴτι*), you fail to meet the test!). As far as the whole remnant of the Bible, it can only be found in Luke 9:13, in the feeding of five thousand (We have no more than five loaves and two fish — unless perhaps (*εἰ μὴτι*) we are to go and buy food for all these people) as well as in Daniel 2:10. A preliminary conclusion is that the possibility presented by *εἰ μὴτι* is not positive, "unless perhaps you fail to meet the test" (2 Cor 13:5b) and "unless perhaps we are to go and buy food for all these people" (Lk 9:13), both of which do not match Paul's thinking. Here in v. 5, Paul cleverly adds *ἂν*, a particle that stresses even more the condition in which we have tried to capture his idea with "eventually"¹⁸⁵. Paul wants to convey a message of concession, being reluctant to make, yet demonstrating his mind-openness.

ἐκ συμφώνου. *συμφώνου* is an adjective genitive masculine singular of *σύμφωνος* (harmonious, accordant, agreeing in sound, in unison, symphonic) used as a substantive. In the New Testament, it is only found here. Elsewhere, it is only found in the Ecclesiastes (LXX 7:14 "In the day of prosperity live joyfully, and consider in the day of adversity: consider, I say, God also has caused the one to agree with (*σύμφωνος*) the other for this reason, that man should find nothing after him"). Should a marital relationship experience an interruption, Paul adds a mandatory condition to this stage that both partners be in total agreement. Again, Paul gives equal rights to both man and woman; his mandatory condition illustrates how seriously Paul takes the impact of a situation in which a couple does not live together.

πρὸς καιρόν. *καιρόν* is the masculine accusative singular of *καιρός* (a measure of time, a period of time, due measure, proportion, fitness, opportunity, season, advantage, profit). It is used 29 times in Pauline corpus and plays different roles: a specific point in time (1 Cor 4:5), a period of time (1 Thess 2:17), shortness of time (1 Cor 7:29), season (Ga 4:10), occasional opportunity (Ga 6:10)¹⁸⁶. Our v.5 refers to a period of time, like in 1 Thess 2:17 (But for us, brothers, being separated from you for a short time [*πρὸς καιρόν ὥρας*, lit. *for a period of time of an hour*] in face, not in heart, we longed with great eagerness to see you face to face). Here Paul adds a second condition: not only should there be a common agreement on the couple's separation, but that separation must only be for a finite period of time, which is not precisely specified, though assumed to span a short timeframe.

ἵνα σχολάσητε τῇ προσευχῇ (in order to devote yourself to prayer). *σχολάσητε* is the aorist active subjective 2nd plural form of *σχολάζω* (to have leisure or spare time, to have nothing to do, loiter, linger, devote oneself to, and for a place, to be vacant, unoccupied). This is a rare word in the whole Bible, found only here in this v. 5 and in Mt 12:44 (Then it says, 'I will return to my house from which I came.' When it comes, it finds it empty (*σχολάζω*), swept, and put in order). Additionally found in the Septuagint: Exodus 5 (8 "And thou shalt impose on them daily the rate of brick-making which they perform: thou shalt not abate anything, for they are idle (*σχολάζω*)"); and (17 "And he (Pharaoh) said to them, 'You are idle (*σχολάζω*), you are idlers': therefore you say, Let us go and do sacrifice to our God"); as well as in Psalm 45:11 ("Be still (*σχολάζω*), and know that I am God. I will be exalted among the nations. I will be exalted in the earth"). It stems the idea for someone to stop working on this (something) and to steer focus on that (something else). This initiative brought up by Paul entails to halt daily labour for prayer dedicated time; why would Paul ask for this? We may here be interfacing with a Jewish practice¹⁸⁷.

A man would leave home for a while to dedicate time for studying the Torah or for prayer, and not a woman as no one would consult her for either of these. Abstinence might have been perceived as a way to come closer to the divine¹⁸⁸. We have an echo of this in Exodus 19:15, when people were preparing for the Lord's coming: "And he (Moses) said to the people, 'Prepare for the third day; do not go near a woman'", since the fall of man's semen creates uncleanness, according to Leviticus 15:17: "Everything made of cloth or of skin on which the semen falls shall be washed with water, and be unclean until the evening". According to C. Senft, the apocryphal text of the Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs was probably finalized around the 2nd century C.E.; one of its books, *The Testament of Naphtali* 8:8-9, gives a hint of a Jewish custom:

For there is a season (*καιρός*) for a man to embrace his wife, and a season to abstain therefrom for his prayer. So then, there are two commandments; and, unless they be done in due order, they bring very great sin upon men. So also is it with the other commandments¹⁸⁹.

1 Corinthians audience that Paul addresses would have comprised either a significant number of Jewish people or some citizens who would have adopted this Jewish practice, or both.

¹⁸⁵ On *ἂν*, see Henry George Liddell, Robert Scott, [A Greek-English Lexicon](#).

¹⁸⁶ Noteworthy is that, in the three letters we considered unauthentic, time receives a new meaning in the plural form and refers to the future when Christ or Spirit will intervene (Eph 1:10; 1 Tim 4:1; Titus 1:3).

¹⁸⁷ Conzelmann, *op. cit.*, p. 117, and Senft, *op. cit.*, p. 89.

¹⁸⁸ See Senft, *ibid.*

¹⁸⁹ Senft, *ibid.*, note 13.

τῆ προσευχῆ is the feminine dative singular of *προσευχή* (prayer). It occurs 14 times in the Pauline corpus, 9 of which in the plural form: prayers. The emphasis lays prayer as an ongoing activity, reiterated in (Rom 12:12 “Rejoice in hope, be patient in suffering, persevere in constant prayer”; Col 4:2 “continue steadfastly in prayer, keeping alert in it with thanksgiving”), and being performed by Paul himself (1 Thess 1:2 “We always give thanks to God for all of you and mention you in our prayers”). We are laying out these instances, which awkwardly fit in our current v.5, yet some Corinthians would have needed to retreat for prayer time.

καὶ πάλιν ἐπὶ τὸ αὐτὸ ἦτε (and again be together). *ἐπὶ τὸ αὐτὸ* is an adverbial phrase¹⁹⁰, including: the preposition *ἐπὶ* (on, upon when followed by the accusative); the definite article *τὸ*, neuter accusative singular of *ὁ* (the); the reflexive pronoun *αὐτό*, neuter accusative singular of *αὐτός* (itself, same); and its meaning sounds like: in the same place, together, in all. Here again, it is a rarissima expression that occurs only a few other instances in the New Testament.

- 1 Cor 11:20 “When you come together (*ἐπὶ τὸ αὐτό*), it is not really to eat the Lord's supper”.
- 1 Cor 14:23 “If, therefore, the whole church comes together (*ἐπὶ τὸ αὐτό*) and all speak in tongues, and outsiders or unbelievers enter, will they not say that you are out of your mind?”.
- Acts 1:15 “In those days Peter stood up among the believers - together (*ἐπὶ τὸ αὐτό*) the crowd numbered about one hundred twenty persons - and said”.
- Acts 2:1 “When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together (*ἐπὶ τὸ αὐτό*) in one place”.
- Acts 2:44 “All who believed were together (*ἐπὶ τὸ αὐτό*) and had all things in common”.
- Acts 2:47 “praising God and having the goodwill of all the people. And day by day the Lord added (*ἐπὶ τὸ αὐτό*) to their number those who were being saved”.
- Acts 4:26 “The kings of the earth took their stand, and the rulers have gathered together (*ἐπὶ τὸ αὐτό*) against the Lord and against his Messiah”.
- Mt 22:34 “When the Pharisees heard that he had silenced the Sadducees, they gathered together (*ἐπὶ τὸ αὐτό*)”
- Lk 17:35 “There will be two women grinding meal together (*ἐπὶ τὸ αὐτό*); one will be taken and the other left”

Whereby most of these examples, *ἐπὶ τὸ αὐτό* denotes a Church meeting or a group gathering, Lk 17:35 mentions two persons working together. Paul uses this expression for couples and adds clarity to it by using both the adverb *πάλιν* (once again), and *ἦτε*, the present active subjunctive 2nd plural of the verb *εἶμι* (to be), a subjunctive that is here equivalent to an imperative: resume now your marital relationship.

ἵνα μὴ πειράζη ὑμᾶς ὁ σατανᾶς διὰ τὴν ἀκρασίαν ὑμῶν (in order not to tempt you the Satan through the debility of yours). Paul gives here the reason why couples should be separated only for a short time period. This could echo v. 2 evoking the danger of promiscuities or *πορνεία*¹⁹¹. Let's find out whether Paul is strengthening what he has already written by looking into: *πειράζει*, *ὁ σατανᾶς*, and *διὰ τὴν ἀκρασίαν*.

ἵνα μὴ πειράζη ὑμᾶς. *πειράζει* is the present active subjunctive 3rd singular of the verb *πειράζω* (to try, to attempt or endeavour, to test, to tempt). This is not a verb that Paul uses often, only 7 instances. The basic idea behind *πειράζω* is to create a difficult situation for testing someone's inner nature and watch how that someone will react to it, as to reveal his or her true self; this could be similar to a court trial where providing answers to hard questions should unveil the truth. For our own trial or test here, we need to call an important witness: *πειρασμός* (experiment, attempt, trial, temptation, test), referred to 4 times in the Pauline corpus, and its associate *εκπειραζω* (to tempt or to test), referred to only once in Paul's letters.

Let us begin with 1 Cor 10:13

You have (so far) been overtaken by no temptation (*πειρασμός*) save only what is human. But God is faithful. He will not allow you to be tempted (*πειράζω*) beyond your powers, but along with the temptation (*πειρασμός*) he will also provide a way out, so that you can bear it.

This situation has to do with some Corinthians, who eat the meat offered to idols and pretend that *performing this test* has no impact whatsoever on themselves. Paul reminds them that life is a test, a test that will end only at the end of times¹⁹². Moreover, God is the author of this test and they can fail it anytime. The message of our v.5 is not a cautious strategy (1 Cor 10:13), but a comforting one that the couple getting back together will be a success¹⁹³.

Then, we have 1 Thess 3:5

For this reason, when I could bear it no longer, I sent to find out about your faith; I was afraid that somehow the tester (*πειραζων*) had tested (*πειράζω*) you and that our labour had been in vain.

This context is about persecutions, of the pagan origin young community, coming from their own countrymen (1 Thess 2:14), so that those pagans break down to pressure, leave their community and faith too. Paul is rejoicing here after the goods news

¹⁹⁰ Henry George Liddell, Robert Scott, [A Greek-English Lexicon](#).

¹⁹¹ Both Conzelmann, [op. cit.](#), p. 116 and Senft, [op. cit.](#), p. 89 believe that Paul brings us back to the idea of v. 2 with “*διὰ τὴν ἀκρασίαν*”.

¹⁹² Conzelmann, [op. cit.](#), p. 169, gives an eschatological interpretation of “he will also provide a way out, so that you can bear it”.

¹⁹³ Conzelmann, [ibid.](#), and Senft, [op. cit.](#), p. 132.

brought by Timothy¹⁹⁴. Are those countrymen the “tester”, or is Satan the “tempter”¹⁹⁵? Unfortunately, there is no other case where Paul uses *πειράζων*, the active present participle of *πειράζω*, which can be literally translated: the one testing¹⁹⁶. The “tester” in the Gospels: is the Devil in Mt 4:1, is a Pharisee (lawyer) in Mt 22:35, and is Jesus himself in Jn 6:6 when He is about to test Philip. The Septuagint provides only one case in Sir 18:23 where the “tester” is a believer (Before making a vow, prepare yourself; do not be like one putting to test the Lord)¹⁹⁷.

Finally, we have Gal 6:1:

My friends, if anyone is detected in a transgression, you who have received the Spirit should restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness. Take care that you yourselves are not tempted (*πειράζω*).

Chapter 6 is the last one in this letter to Galatians, the exhortation part, where after criticizing the Galatians because of their acceptance to be influenced by intruders, Judaizers from Antioch¹⁹⁸, Paul asks for gentleness among community members, since being tested - as in transgression (*παραπτωμα*) - may happen to everyone, including those who received the Spirit. Although transgression is defined as opposite to the Law (this is the thread of Romans 5), Paul has just said that Christ has freed us from the Law, by referring to trespasses in a general way, and this is why those with the Spirit should correct faulty behaviour gently.

What to conclude from our analysis of *πειράζω*? Those situations in these 3 passages causing tests are rather miscellaneous ones: cautious reminder to Christians of pagan origin about their previous social life (meat offered to idols), persecution from fellow countrymen, responsibility from the new Christian life; and in our v. 5, absence of a spouse that could give way to *πορνεία*. These conducted tests relate to anything that could pull Christians away: from true faith, from their community, and from expected behaviour. In our v. 5, that test can be avoided if spouses stay together, as in 1 Cor 10:13 where Christians should stay away from a temple's celebration regarding meat offered to idols, emphasized by both: *ἵνα* (the conjunction “in order to”) and *μη* (the negative particle “not”).

ὁ σατανᾶς. Here Paul is clear about the tempter or tester; this word plausibly come from the Hebrew *sātān*, the adversary¹⁹⁹. It occurs 10 times in the Pauline corpus. A conspicuous occurrence is in 1 Cor 5:5 when he reacts to a case of *πορνεία* where a man has his father's wife, which results in a radical solution: “you are to hand this man over to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord”. What could entail Paul's drastic sentence for this man? On this sentence, Conzelmann writes: “The destruction of the flesh can hardly mean anything else but death (cf 11:30)²⁰⁰”. But what kind of death? Paul would not mean a physical death, but rather an excommunication of that man to be excluded from the community.

Excommunication means for someone to no longer take part in his or her community life, and being considered an outsider or stranger. Murphy-O'Connor brings insights while reflecting on the power of sin in Rom 3:9 by stating that Paul doesn't see sin as a personal act, but as “a symbol or a myth expressive of a world in which individuals were forced to be other than they desired to be; the authentic self was alienated (Rom. 7: 20)²⁰¹”. A force greater than any individual is the value system of society, for which Paul uses the expression “*ὑπὸ τὰ στοιχεῖα τοῦ κόσμου*” (the elemental spirits of the world) in Gal 3:4, meaning that human beings live their lives under the influence or sway of primal and cosmic forces²⁰². We could interpret these primal and cosmic forces as representing Satan, whereby “Freedom becomes a reality only ‘in Christ’, namely, in and through the Christian community²⁰³”. This clarifies Paul's statement “handing a man over to Satan”: by removing him (that man) from the community, the only place where freedom could be found and lived, then he (that man) returns to a world of slavery to cosmic forces, the world of sin, the world of Satan.

Paul's decision here stipulated in v.5 may sound harsh in comparison to disorderly behaviour cases he had faced in Thessalonica: *ἀτακτος* (1 Thess 5:14), with this instruction to that community in his second letter: “Take note of those who do not obey what we say in this letter; have nothing to do with them, so that they may be ashamed. Do not regard them as enemies, but warn them as believers” (2 Thess 3:14-15). That which measure shows much tolerance compared with his harsh measure in Corinth. On this, Murphy-O'Connor writes:

A more mature and sophisticated Paul will achieve the same result (the hope that the punishment will effect the reformation of the erring brother) without compromising his principles in 1 Corinthians 5: 1– 5²⁰⁴.

¹⁹⁴ Murphy-O'Connor, *Paul. A Critical Life*, p. 104-107; stating that (1 Thess 2:13 – 4:2) is focused on Paul's reaction to Timothy's goods news after coming back from Thessalonica.

¹⁹⁵ Most translations use the uppercase, capital T: Tempter.

¹⁹⁶ Conzelmann, *ibid.*, “Paul has not much interest in a theory of temptation's origin”.

¹⁹⁷ Typical of many passages in the Old Testament, for instance during the Exodus when the people tested the patience of God.

¹⁹⁸ Murphy-O'Connor, *op. cit.*, p. 193-198.

¹⁹⁹ C. L. Willibald Grimm, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*. Translated by J. H. Thayer. New York: American Book Company, 1889 ([Internet Edition](#))

²⁰⁰ *Op. cit.*, p. 97.

²⁰¹ Murphy-O'Connor, *Paul: A Critical Life*, p. 101.

²⁰² *Op. cit.*, p. 207.

²⁰³ Murphy-O'Connor, *Paul: A Critical Life*, p. 208.

²⁰⁴ *Op. cit.*, p. 127.

Moreover, C. Senft explains this harsh measure more accurately: for the Jewish Paul, sexual disorder is extremely serious²⁰⁵.

Satan is not only leading the world outside the community²⁰⁶, but also creating roadblocks for Paul. In 2 Cor 2:1-11, Paul refers to a painful letter he wrote because someone would have insulted him personally, determining: “And we do this so that we may not be outwitted by Satan; for we are not ignorant of his designs” (2 Cor 2:11). Attacks against Paul went on in a more subtle manner when some Corinthians, noticing that he accepted some financial support from Philippians and not from Corinthians, started questioning his attachment to the Church of Corinth²⁰⁷. To which he responds: “For such boasters are false apostles, deceitful workers, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ. And no wonder! Even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light” (2 Cor 11:13-14). Without providing any specifics, Paul says to his audience: “we wanted to come to you — certainly I, Paul, wanted to again and again — but Satan blocked our way” (1 Thess 2:18). According to Murphy-O’Connor, on this encountered roadblock:

Satan is invariably mentioned in connection with those who are already believers, whereas Sin is exclusively associated with unbelievers²⁰⁸. One of the believers would have been the roadblock, himself a delegate of Satan the adversary.

2 Cor 12:7 lays out another role of Satan:

Therefore, to keep me from being too elated, a thorn was given me in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to torment me, to keep me from being too elated.

On the one hand, Murphy-O’Connor’s interpretation of this thorn is consistent with Satan’s role as the adversary: that thorn is the opposition to Paul’s ministry, and the grief caused by members of the community at Thessalonica, Philippi, Corinth, Galatia, Ephesus, Colossae; never was Paul able to sit down and look with satisfaction and pride at what he has achieved, Satan was taking care of that ²⁰⁹.

On the other hand, Satan’s reign is coming to an end:

And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord Jesus will destroy with the breath of his mouth, annihilating him by the manifestation of his coming. The coming of the lawless one is apparent in the working of Satan, who uses all power, signs, lying wonders (2 Cor 2:8-9). And this will take place soon: “The God of peace will shortly crush Satan under your feet” (Rom 16:20).

That opposition to Paul’s Ministry is personalised through an external agent, Satan, an adversary known in the Jewish world²¹⁰. Even though Satan will be completely defeated with the coming of the Lord, he is nonetheless constantly active every day in his kingdom throughout the world. Therefore, Christians are to be mindful for any of them to potentially become a prey of that tireless opponent.

διὰ τὴν ἀκρασίαν ὑμῶν. ἀκρασίαν is the feminine accusative singular of *ἀκρασία* (want of power, debility, incontinence, want of self-control, intemperance), and it only occurs here in the whole Pauline corpus. It is the substantive of the adjective *ἀκρατής* (without self-control, powerless, impotent, and immoderate). It is also found in Mt 23:25 (Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you clean the outside of the cup and of the plate, but inside you are full of greed and self-indulgence (*ἀκρασία*)). *ἀκρασία* includes the prefix *α* (absence) and *κράτος* (might, power, strength). Hence, Paul would consider that Corinthians have hardly any resistance or will power when facing sexual drive.

Summarizing v. 5, Paul insists that couples remain together and avoid staying away from each other. What is Paul’s rationale? Personal weakness, or Corinth’s opportunities for prostitution, or inappropriate behaviour, or having sex with another partner - any of which could easily become a trap for any Christian to fall into. Jewish Paul considers any of these a terrible sin that impacts the whole person, including the temple where the Spirit should reside (1 Cor 6:19). In light of this human weakness, even more pertinent to man, Paul insists on minimizing situations where a couple is not together: only for a type of retreat typical of Jewish practice, and that for the shortest possible timeframe.

6. v. 6 Conclusion: This is a concession

τοῦτο δὲ λέγω κατὰ συγγνώμην οὐ κατ’ ἐπιταγήν (But this I say as a concession not as an obligation).

τοῦτο δὲ λέγω (But this I say). Paul uses sometimes this expression to bring more precision or clarity to what he has been saying. For instance, in 1 Cor 10:10 Paul is introducing the topic on division and quarrels in the community, then in 1 Cor 1:10

²⁰⁵ “Il ne faut pas oublier que pour Paul, qui partage en cela l’opinion des rabbins (cf 6:18), les péchés du sexe sont particulièrement graves”, Senft, *op. cit.*, p. 74

²⁰⁶ There seems to be some similarity between Paul’s vision of the world and the Gospel according to John (for instance Jn 12:31 where the adversary is described as “the ruler of this world”).

²⁰⁷ See Murphy-O’Connor, *op. cit.*, p. 319.

²⁰⁸ Murphy-O’Connor, *op. cit.*, p. 335.

²⁰⁹ Murphy-O’Connor, *op. cit.*, p. 321; “His mention of ‘a messenger of Satan’ implies an external, personal source of affliction; previously, he had identified as ‘servants of Satan’ (2 Cor. 11:4- 15) his adversaries at Corinth. In the Old Testament, ‘thorns’ is a metaphor for Israel’s enemies, both within (Num. 33:35) and without (Ezek. 28: 24)”.

²¹⁰ Sir 21: 27 “When an ungodly person curses a Satan (adversary), he curses himself”.

he says: “λέγω δὲ τοῦτο” (But I say this), to bring precision on what is really happening. In Gal 3:17, after referring to God’s promise of an offspring to Abraham, he says “τοῦτο δὲ λέγω” (But this I say) to comment and explain what was meant. In Col 2:4, after writing how much he has been struggling so that the community be united in love and have the knowledge of God’s mystery, he says “Τοῦτο λέγω” (This I say), to explain that his main goal is to avoid having them be deceived by false witnesses. And here v. 6, Paul uses this expression to bring precision to and conclude what he has been saying in v. 2-5²¹¹.

κατὰ συγγνώμην (as a concession). *συγγνώμην* is the feminine accusative singular of *συγγνώμη* (pardon, indulgence, concession, permission, allowance, forbearance, lenient judgment, excuse). This word is composed of *σύν* (with) and *γνώμη* (thought, judgment, opinion), and so refers to an opinion where one consents to another’s one. Unfortunately, it here is the only instance of the word in the whole New Testament. The only other occurrences are found in Ben Sirah²¹²:

- even if his mind fails, be indulgent (*συγγνώμη*) with him; because you have all your faculties do not despise him (Sir 3:13)
- You are invited therefore to read it with goodwill and attention, and to be indulgent (*συγγνώμη*) (Sir Prologue:18).

Ben Sirach shades an interesting light on *συγγνώμη* by pulling it in the direction of indulgence, as the latter is a way to adapt to a specific situation: in Sir 3:13 the situation is someone who have become senile or has a mental illness; in Sir 0:18, the author is referring to the challenge of translation from Hebrew to Greek, saying: “For what was originally expressed in Hebrew does not have exactly the same sense when translated into another language”. If we go back to Paul, he needs to be indulgent as the Corinthians may not be as strong as one would like them to be. This would be a typical example where Paul is realistic and knows the human heart, and so adapts his requirements to the situation. In this case, “concession” or “permission” would mean, I am adapting to your situation and capability.

οὐ κατ’ ἐπιταγήν (not as an obligation). *ἐπιταγήν* is the feminine accusative singular of *ἐπιταγή* (injunction, mandate, command, instruction, order, authority). It is found only seven times in the whole New Testament, and only in the Pauline corpus. Its related verb *ἐπιτάσσω* (to enjoin upon, order, command, charge, put upon one as a duty) is barely more frequent, 10 times in the New Testament, all in Gospels-Acts except for Philem 1:8 (For this reason, though I am bold enough in Christ to command (*ἐπιτάσσω*) you to do your duty). *ἐπιταγή* conveys a flavor of authority. If we focus on the authentic letters, we end up with the following instances on top of v. 6:

- 1 Cor 7:25 “Now concerning virgins, I have no command of the Lord (*ἐπιταγήν κυρίου οὐκ ἔχω*), but I give my opinion as one who by the Lord’s mercy is trustworthy”
- 2 Cor 8:8 “I do not say this as a command (*Οὐ κατ’ ἐπιταγήν λέγω*), but I am testing the genuineness of your love against the earnestness of others”
- Rom 16:26 “but is now disclosed, and through the prophetic writings is made known to all the Gentiles, according to the command (*κατ’ ἐπιταγήν*) of the eternal God, to bring about the obedience of faith”

On the level of wording, the closest parallel is with 2 Cor 8:8 where Paul is talking about the collection of the saints, and after referring to the generosity of the Church in Macedonia, he asks the Corinthians to excel in this generous undertaking. Then he adds: “I do not say this as a command”. This is a way to qualify what he as been saying: he wanted to test their generosity. So contributing to the collections of the saints cannot be mandatory or be forced, it is not an obligation.

1 Cor 7:25 Paul answers the question pertaining to virgins and put in contrast a word from the Lord and a word from him: the former is called *ἐπιταγή*, an authoritative word, and the latter is called *γνώμη*, an opinion, a personal judgment. Even though Paul stresses the fact that his opinion has value, he doesn’t put it on the same level of an *ἐπιταγή* of the Lord. He hopes Corinthians will follow his advice, but he cannot and doesn’t want to force them.

One may have noticed that the three instances of *ἐπιταγή* in 1 Cor 7:6.25 and 2 Cor 8:8 appear in a negative form. This seems to reflect Paul’s style: he stays away from strict rules, and prefers to provide advice as a trustworthy pastor²¹³. The only instance of a positive instance of *ἐπιταγή* is when God is the subject: “but is now disclosed (revelation of the mystery), and through the prophetic writings is made known to all the Gentiles, according to the command (*ἐπιταγή*) of the eternal God, to bring about the obedience of faith” (Rom 16:26). In the latter case, *ἐπιταγή* means God’s eternal plan and decision.

How to conclude our analysis of v. 6? After explaining that it is important for men and women to be married and have regular sexual intercourses to avoid being the prey of Satan, the adversary, who would test them with promiscuities, widely spread in the pagan milieu of Corinth, and as being a one body they need to take care of each other and cannot spare being away from each other, unless for a very brief period of time for the special religious retreat from the Jewish tradition, Paul needs to provide clarification: the choice of becoming one body through marriage and having regular sexual intercourses is not mandatory, but it is an advice based on Paul’s assessment of human frailty. One may wonder why Paul needs to add: “But this I say as a concession not as an obligation”. It would be surprising that one would read v. 2-5 and feel there is an obligation to be married and have regular sexual intercourses. In fact, the only real obligation is avoiding promiscuity (*πορνεία*). Paul is not

²¹¹ Senft, *op. cit.*, p. 89-90, Conzelmann, *op. cit.*, p. 118, and Hurd, *op. cit.*, p. 161-163 all discuss the scope of *τοῦτο*, i.e. only v. 5 (to devote time to prayer), or the whole of v. 2-5 (to avoid abstinence), and all agree that scope is v. 2-5.

²¹² This is not first instance where we can find in Paul an echo Ben Sirach’s vocabulary. We have already seen the case for *πορνείας* (promiscuity), *ἀποστερέω* (be deprived of), and *πειράζω* (to test).

²¹³ On this note, Murphy-O’Connor, *op. cit.*, p. 284, writes: “It was unfortunate that they (Corinthians) made mistakes, but the fact that they at least made the effort put them far ahead of the Galatians, who were too timid even to try, and who sought the safety of authoritative rules and regulations. Whereas Paul ordered the Galatians to accept the burden of freedom, he entered into dialogue with the Corinthians”.

proposing the marital path as he would for instance urge and encourage and plead the Thessalonians to “lead a life worthy of God, who calls you into his own kingdom and glory” (1 Thess 2:12). There are no such things as: be married, be happy. It is more: be married, avoid promiscuity. So v.6 is a way for Paul to say: yes, but... The “but” will be explained afterwards. V.6 is at the same time a conclusion and a transition.

7. v. 7 Conclusion: Be single like me if you have god’s gift

θέλω δὲ πάντας ἀνθρώπους εἶναι ὡς καὶ ἐμαυτὸν• ἀλλ’ ἕκαστος ἴδιον ἔχει χάρισμα ἐκ θεοῦ, ὁ μὲν οὕτως, ὁ δὲ οὕτως (But I would wish that all men be also like myself. But each has his own gift from God, on the one hand like this, on the other hand like that)

Now we have the “but”: *θέλω δὲ πάντας ἀνθρώπους εἶναι ὡς καὶ ἐμαυτὸν* (But I would wish that all men be also like myself). The verb *θέλω* is the present active subjunctive 1st person singular of *θέλω* (to will or intend, to be resolved or determined, to purpose, to desire or wish). This subjunctive²¹⁴ in the main clause refers to something that is not part of reality, and even unrealisable. It is worthwhile to look at similar cases:

- 1 Cor 7:32 “I would like (*θέλω*) you to be free from anxieties. The unmarried man is anxious about the affairs of the Lord, how to please the Lord”
- 1 Cor 14:5 “Now I would like (*θέλω*) all of you to speak in tongues, but even more to prophesy. One who prophesies is greater than one who speaks in tongues, unless someone interprets, so that the church may be built up”

So, Paul would like Corinthians to be free of anxieties, and he would like to see all of them speaking in tongues, but they are not. Similarly, in v. 6 Paul would like to see all Corinthians single as he is, but they are not. The impossible aspect of this wish is emphasized by the *ἀλλά* (but) of the next sentence²¹⁵.

But in most cases²¹⁶, *θέλω* is in the present indicative tense. It is worth noting in which cases Paul is making such statements. Let’s give four examples.

- 1 Cor 10:1 “I do not want (*θέλω*) you to be unaware, brothers and sisters, that our ancestors were all under the cloud, and all passed through the sea”
- 1 Cor 10:20 “No, I imply that what pagans sacrifice, they sacrifice to demons and not to God. I do not want (*θέλω*) you to be partners with demons”
- 1 Cor 11:3 “But I want (*θέλω*) you to understand that Christ is the source of every man, and the husband is the source of his wife, and God is the source of Christ”
- 1 Cor 12:1 “Now concerning spiritual gifts, brothers and sisters, I do not want (*θέλω*) you to be uninformed”

In these four examples, what Paul wants can easily be implemented, as it is only a matter of providing teaching and instruction.

But in v. 6, what Paul wants is not that easy. One could be puzzled by such a wish from an intelligent man as Paul, knowing that if such a wish to become reality would mean the end to world, as they would be no children anymore. Paul will clarify is thinking later on²¹⁷.

Who Paul would like to see like him? *πάντας ἀνθρώπους*: all men. Is the expression including women? Of course! In our analysis of v. 1, we have stated that *ἀνθρωπος* as opposed to woman does not belong to Paul’s vocabulary. If we extend our analysis to “*πᾶς ἀνθρωπος*” (every man) and “*πάντα ἀνθρωποι*” (all men), in almost all cases it refers to both men and women. A few examples will suffice.

- 1 Cor 15:19 “If for this life only we have hoped in Christ, we are of all people (*πάντα ἀνθρωποι*) most to be pitied”
- 2 Cor 3:2 “You yourselves are our letter, written on our hearts, to be known and read by all (*πάντα ἀνθρωποι*)”
- Rom 3:4 “By no means! Although everyone (*πᾶς ἀνθρωπος*) is a liar, let God be proved true, as it is written, ‘So that you may be justified in your words, and prevail in your judging.’”
- Rom 5:12 “Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death came through sin, and so death spread to all because all (*πάντα ἀνθρωποι*) have sinned”²¹⁸

Obviously, the whole humanity, including men and women, has sinned, and the whole humanity is saved in Christ. *ἀνθρωπος* includes both men and women. There is only one exception from Paul’s pen: “Once again I testify to every man (*πᾶς*

²¹⁴ As *θέλω* can be either present indicative or present subjunctive, determining which is what comes to a judgment call.

²¹⁵ This is pinpointed by Senft, *op. cit.*, p. 90.

²¹⁶ 17 times out of a total of 20. It must be noted that *θέλω* only shows up in what we consider the authentic letters.

²¹⁷ Hurd, *op. cit.*, p. 166-167 writes: “It may also be that the Corinthians had made a direct reference to Paul’s own marital status. Such a reference could well explain Paul’s statements in 7:7 (‘I wish all were as I myself am. But each has his own special gift from God, one of one kind and one of another’), and the form of his advice in 7:8 (‘It is well for them to remain as I am’). It is unlikely that Paul would have independently reminded the Corinthians of this own celibacy, a topic that certainly did not further the practical goal which, we have suggested, Paul had in mind”. So, if reference to Paul’s marital status was initiated by the Corinthians, then we have another example here where Paul tries to tone down their enthusiasm.

²¹⁸ See also Rom 2:1; 5:18; 12:17-18; 1 Thess 2:15; Phil 4:5; Col 1:28.

ἄνθρωπος) who lets himself be circumcised that he is obliged to obey the entire law” (Gal 5:3). But the context is clear in referring only to a male.

εἶναι ὡς καὶ ἐμαυτὸν (be also like me). It is not the unique case where Paul proposes himself as a model to follow. Earlier in 1 Cor 4:6, referring to divisions in the community, Paul writes: “I have applied all this to Apollos and myself (ἐμαυτὸν) for your benefit, brothers and sisters, so that you may learn through us the meaning of the saying, ‘Nothing beyond what is written,’ so that none of you will be puffed up in favour of one against another”. But it is through the verb μιμέομαι (imitate, represent), and the noun μιμητής (imitator), or συμμιμητής (joint imitator), that Paul will ask believers to mimic his behaviour.

- 1 Thess 1:6 “And you became imitators (μιμητής) of us and of the Lord, for in spite of persecution you received the word with joy inspired by the Holy Spirit”
- 2 Thess 3:7 “For you yourselves know how you ought to imitate (μιμέομαι) us; we were not idle when we were with you”
- 2 Thess 3:9 “This was not because we do not have that right (to receive funding), but in order to give you an example to imitate (μιμέομαι)”
- Phil 3:17 “Brothers and sisters, join in imitating (συμμιμητής) me, and observe those who live according to the example you have in us”
- 1 Cor 4:16 “I appeal to you, then, be imitators (μιμητής) of me”
- 1 Cor 11:1 “Be imitators of me (μιμητής), as I am of Christ”.

Why is Paul repeating so often: be imitators of me? This is the result of getting rid of the law: as there is no specific rule to follow, what is left is to follow those who embody the Spirit of Christ. And Paul can ask believers to follow him, especially when he continues preaching the good news despite opposition (1 Thess 1:16); he was never idle, but toil and labour night and day, so that he might not burden to the community (2 Thess 3:7-9); he doesn’t try to be righteous by following the law, but by believing in Christ (Phil 3:17); he doesn’t boast himself, but has accepted to be last of all men, to become like the rubbish of the world, the dregs of all things, a fool and weak according to men standard (1 Cor 4:16); he tried to please everyone in everything and didn’t seek his own advantage (1 Cor 11:1). So, it is easy to say in a generic way, be imitators of me. But how about celibacy? Paul could not say: be imitators of me as a celibate. This is too precise. And impossible. So, he only says: I would wish that all men be also like myself.

ἀλλ’ ἕκαστος ἴδιον ἔχει χάρισμα ἐκ θεοῦ, ὁ μὲν οὕτως, ὁ δὲ οὕτως (But each has his own gift from God, on the one hand like this, on the other hand like that). ἕκαστος (each) already prepares us to understand that no size fits all. What is specific to each individual is ἴδιον χάρισμα (own gift).

To understand Paul’s thinking, we need to better master what he means by χάρισμα, especially in the context of H. Conzelmann’s statement: “It is not, of course, that marriage is here described as a charisma”.²¹⁹ Is celibacy then a charisma? What is noteworthy, χάρισμα seems to be a word created by Paul. In the whole Bible, it shows up 16 times, but only in Pauline corpus, except for 1 Pt 4:10. It belongs to the same family as χάρις (grace, favour, beauty, glory, kindness, goodwill). So let’s start with a brief analysis of the latter.

In the Septuagint, χάρις is used to translate חַן (hēn: favour, grace from a ruler; see Gen 39:4; 49:25, etc.)²²⁰. But to understand this word in the New Testament, the Greek context is more useful. χάρις refers to what brings joy, favour, sympathy, kindness. And it is typical of Paul to derive other words from it, like εὐχαριστέω (to give thanks), εὐχαριστία (gratitude)²²¹.

χάρις occurs 74 times in the Pauline corpus. To understand his main references to grace, we need to read first Rom 5:5 (“and hope does not disappoint us, because God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us”). From this belief, Paul can say: “I give thanks to my God always for you because of the grace (χάρις) of God that has been given you in Christ Jesus” (1 Cor 1:4). As believers, Corinthians received God’s grace through Christ. Of course, Paul himself received this grace, and this grace contributed in shaping him as a minister of the Gospel: “But by the grace (χάρις) of God I am what I am, and his grace (χάρις) toward me has not been in vain. On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them — though it was not I, but the grace (χάρις) of God that is with me” (1 Cor 15:10). This grace is described as strength: “but he said to me, ‘My grace is sufficient for you, for power is made perfect in weakness’” (2 Cor 12:9).

But as it is often case with Paul, words are flexible and can receive different meanings. In Rom 5:17, χάρις become synonymous of righteousness and justification: “If, because of the one man’s trespass, death exercised dominion through that one, much more surely will those who receive the abundance of grace (χάρις) and the free gift of righteousness exercise dominion in life through the one man, Jesus Christ” (see also Rom 5:21). Sometimes, χάρις is opposed to “works”, when Paul wants to stress the fact God’s love is not dependant on human deeds (Rom 11:6). And, at the end of each of his letter, Paul writes: “The grace (χάρις) of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you”, as a way to summarizing the chore of the Christian belief and praying that it stays for ever²²².

²¹⁹ Conzelmann, *op. cit.*, p. 118. He is taking position against Allo (see note 34). When analyzing later on 1 Cor 12, Conzelmann, p. 207, ties *χαρίσματα* to *πνευματικά* (“*χαρίσματα* is an equivalent for *πνευματικά* and is ascribed as such to the Spirit”).

²²⁰ Jean-Pierre Prévost, Hughes Cousin, *Charis, Charisma, Eucharistō, Eucharistia*, in *Nouveau vocabulaire biblique*, p. 316-319.

²²¹ *Op. cit.*, p. 318.

²²² Conzelmann writes: “As with the opening greeting, it should be noted that such a “blessing” is not an edifying phrase, but an effectual communication of grace and love”, p. 301. We are skipping in this analysis four other meanings of χάρις: 1) as a Greek greeting, coupled with Shalom (peace), the Jewish greeting (13 times, i.e. at the beginning of each letter); 2) thankfulness, in the same sense as giving thanks, for

χάρισμα, a word created by Paul, needs to be understood in this context. Among the 16 occurrences in the Pauline corpus, 9 are in a singular form. In this form, it looks similar to *χάρης*. A typical example is Rom 5:15-17.

But the free gift (*χάρισμα*) is not like the trespass. For if the many died through the one man's trespass, much more surely have the grace (*χάρης*) of God and the free gift (*δωρεά*) in the grace (*χάρης*) of the one man, Jesus Christ, abounded for the many. 16 And the free gift (*δωρεά*) is not like the effect of the one man's sin. For the judgment following one trespass brought condemnation, but the free gift (*χάρισμα*) following many trespasses brings justification. If, because of the one man's trespass, death exercised dominion through that one, much more surely will those who receive the abundance of grace (*χάρης*) and the free gift (*δωρεά*) of righteousness exercise dominion in life through the one man, Jesus Christ.

So *χάρισμα*, *δωρεά*²²³, and *χάρης* are used as synonyms. All refer to the free gift of God through Jesus Christ that brought justification to the many, stopping the impact of the one man's trespass.

But again, Paul doesn't stick to a single meaning of a word. For instance, Paul uses *χάρισμα* to describe his release from jail, a blessing or gift due to the community's prayer (2 Cor 1:11). More importantly for us, it seems that grace is not a "once and for all" thing: it can and needs to grow, like a plant. In Rom 1:11, Paul writes: "For I am longing to see you so that I may share with you some spiritual gift (*χάρισμα πνευματικόν*) to strengthen you". What is this spiritual gift? We need to assume that it refers to his teaching²²⁴. In 1 Cor 1:7, Paul writes: "so that you are not lacking in any gift (*χάρισμα*) as you wait for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ". He had just given thanks because of the grace (*χάρης*) that has been given to the Corinthians, so that they have been enriched in speech and knowledge. What this means is that the original *χάρης* needs to be strengthened by an adequate preaching and teaching, and they could be lacking. So *χάρισμα* refers to the gift of knowledge that is added on top of the original gift (*χάρης*) through faith²²⁵.

Let's move to the plural form, *χαρίσματα*. The plural form is gathered in 1 Cor 12 that starts this way: "Now concerning spiritual [gifts] (*πνευματικός*), brothers and sisters, I do not want you to be uninformed" (1 Cor 12:1). Before moving further, let's clarify what Paul means by *πνευματικός* (spiritual). The latter is an adjective, derived from *πνευμα* (spirit), that Paul used in different ways. And more specifically, he sometimes uses it as an adjective, sometimes as a substantive. As an adjective, it qualifies different things²²⁶: spiritual (*πνευματικός*) understanding that is a new way of seeing the world after receiving God's grace (Col 1:9); spiritual (*πνευματικός*) songs (Col 3:16) that expresses the power of the Spirit; spiritual (*πνευματικός*) food, the manna eaten by the Israelites in the desert, and the spiritual (*πνευματικός*) drink, the water that came out of the rock in the exodus and which Paul refers to Christ (1 Cor 10:4). Probably, in the latter cases, the spiritual thing played the same role as *χάρης* or grace provided by God through Christ. Then Paul talks of "spiritual" body: "It is sown a physical body, it is raised a spiritual (*πνευματικός*) body. If there is a physical body, there is also a spiritual body" (1 Cor 15:44). The latter refers to the heavenly situation after the resurrection. Finally, in Romans Paul refers to spiritual things in two different ways: first, he considers the Law as being spiritual (*πνευματικός*) (Rom 7:14), then he says: "For I am longing to see you so that I may share with you some spiritual (*πνευματικός*) gift (*χάρισμα*) to strengthen you" (Rom 1:11). We have already discussed the latter case when mentioning that this is the outcome of *χάρης*, as grace needs to grow especially through preaching so that Christian knowledge takes its full expansion. We need to conclude that *πνευματικός*, as an adjective, covers to full spectrum of the Spirit's work: from the initial God's gift through Christ, then its action through different means, the Law, preaching, that change our understanding of the world, and finally in the transformation of all things, including the body that become spiritual through the resurrection. As we have already stated, Paul's usage of words fits many size and is rarely restricted to a single meaning.

When used as a substantive, *πνευματικός* covers again many aspects of the reality. In Cor 2:13, Paul writes: "And we speak of these things in words not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit, communicating spiritual things (*πνευματικός*) in a spiritual manner (*πνευματικός*)". The first *πνευματικός* (spiritual things) refers mainly to Paul's teaching (see also 1 Cor 9:11), but also to the Jewish tradition (Rom 15:27). The second *πνευματικός* refers to the way the Spirit is communicating, not by schemes of rhetoric, but the power of being able to transform things. And so Paul distinguishes two human types (1 Cor 2:15; 3:1), the natural man (*ψυχικός*), and the spiritual man (*πνευματικός*) who can understand Paul's teaching, because he accepted to have his life led by the Spirit (see also Gal 6:1). All this brings us to 1 Cor 12 where Paul wants to shade light on *πνευματικός* (used here as a substantive, in a plural form)²²⁷. Then he goes on: "Now there are varieties of gifts (*χάρισμα*), but the same Spirit" (1 Cor 12:4). As we have just seen, one meaning of *πνευματικός* refers to the way the Spirit is communicating,

instance 1 Cor 10:30 (8 times); 3) liberality, generosity from human agents, for instance 2 Cor 8:7 (2 times); 4) kindness in speech, for instance Col 4:6 (1 time). These meanings were considered irrelevant to our study.

²²³ On *δωρεά*, see also: 2 Cor 9:15; Eph 3:7; 4:7.

²²⁴ "To strengthen" is also found in 1 Thess 3:2 where it is related to Timothy's work, in 1 Thess 3:13 where Paul's pray so that love increases, in 2 Thess 2:17 where it refers to a growth in work and word and in 2 Thess 3:3 where it has generic meaning in preventing from the Evil one.

²²⁵ We have skipped 2 instances where *χάρισμα* refers to the sacramental grace provided through the laying on of hands by the council of elders (1 Tim 4:14; 2 Tim 1:6), as they are not helpful in our study.

²²⁶ Here we follow the order of composition of Paul's letters as proposed by Murphy-O'Connor, *op. cit.*, i.e. Galatians and Colossians in 53, 1 Corinthians in 54, and Romans in 55.

²²⁷ According to Murphy-O'Connor, *op. cit.*, p. 280-282, Paul is targeting here the spirited-people, those who would have said "Anathema Jesus!" (1 Cor. 12: 3), as they rejected the crucified Jesus, focussing only on the Christ of glory.

not by rhetoric, but by power. So, what are these varieties of gifts? We must first notice that Paul distinguishes three communication channels of the Spirit:

- Special gifts (1 Cor 12:4)
- Services (1 Cor 12:5)
- Activities or operations (1 Cor 12:6)

All these channels show great varieties, and this is why Paul stresses the fact they stem from the same Spirit. Then he details out the varieties of spiritual actions with no specific order, mixing all the channels. If all these actions are *πνευματικός*, i.e. expression of power from the Spirit, *χάρισμα* is mainly attached to the gift of healing (*ιαμα*) in this chapter: 1 Cor 12:9.28.30. But out of sudden, he concludes: “But strive for the greater (*χάρισμα*) gifts” (1 Cor 12:31). So, obviously, *χάρισμα* is no longer tied to the gift of healing, but seems to belong to a whole gamut of types of action, and we learn by what follows that love is one of them²²⁸.

We need now to go back to 1 Cor 7:7 where Paul says: “But each has his own gift from God”. To summarize our analysis so far, *χάρισμα* is sometimes synonymous of *χάρις*, the grace provided by God through Christ to the believer. In that sense, married couple in the community did receive this *χάρισμα*. The word sometimes refers to the extra gift provided by Paul’s teaching that allows the *χάρις* to grow and be strengthened. In that sense, married couple in the community did receive this *χάρισμα*. Finally, the word sometimes refers to the different expression of the power of the Spirit, like prophesying, healing, doing miracles, ministering, teaching, exhorting, giving generously, leading, being diligent, compassionate and cheerful, and mainly loving (see 1 Cor 12-13 and 1 Rom 12:6-8). In that sense, married couple in the community did receive one or the other of these *χάρισμα*. But here, from the context, Paul is adding capacity to stay single, in order to focus totally on the mission²²⁹, as one of these *χάρισμα*. Obviously, this *χάρισμα* is not expressed through married couple. But, at the same time, we need to remember what Paul is saying about the varieties of *χάρισμα*, using the image of the body: “If all were a single member, where would the body be?” (1 Cor 12:19). So, all *χάρισμα* are required, and together they represent the body of Christ. So, when Paul says: “But each has his own gift from God”, the “but” is not synonymous to “unfortunately”, but means: “we need to take into account how the Spirit distributes its power and ministries”. There is no such thing as an invitation to or promotion of celibacy.

ὁ μὲν οὕτως, ὁ δὲ οὕτως (on the one hand like this, on the other hand like that). The whole expression is unique in the whole Pauline corpus but is not unique in the Greek world. *μὲν* is a particle that sometimes expresses certainty, but when coupled with *δὲ*, it expresses two aspects of the reality: “*μὲν* followed by *δὲ* in the correlative clause or clauses, on the one hand, on the other hand; commonly in Classical Greek, less frequently in later Greek (rare in NT)”²³⁰. And *οὕτως*, an adverb (thus, like this), often used in comparison, refers to the varieties of *χάρισμα*.

8. v. 8 Unmarried and widows should stay single

Λέγω δὲ τοῖς ἀγάμοις καὶ ταῖς χήραις, καλὸν αὐτοῖς ἔαν μείνωσιν ὡς ἐγώ (Then I say to unmarried and to widows, [it is] good for them if they stay like me)

Λέγω (I say). The only reason we are mentioning this verb is that, in this form (present active indicative, 1st person singular), it recurs 41 times in the Pauline corpus and it seems to be used mainly by Paul for two reasons: to clarify what he means (and could be translated: in fact, what I means is...; see 1 Cor 1:12; 10:29; Ga 3:15.17; Col 2:4, etc.), or to make a statement (and could be translated: I declare). Our v. 8 refers to the latter case and the verb intersperse chapter 7:

- v. 6 “But this I say (*λέγω*) as permission not as a command”
- v. 8 “Then I say (*λέγω*) to unmarried and to widows”
- v. 12 “Then to the rest I say (*λέγω*) - I and not the lord”
- v. 35 “I say (*λέγω*) this for your own benefit”

In these four instances, what is he declaring?

- 1) Married couple should avoid staying away from each other and should have regular sexual intercourse (v. 6)
- 2) Unmarried people and widows should remain single (v. 8)
- 3) If an unbeliever consents to live with the believing partner, they should not separate; otherwise, they can separate, as they are no longer bound (v. 12)
- 4) The appointed time has grown short, and so Corinthians should avoid the concerns of married life and have unhindered devotion to the Lord (v. 35).

So these four statements cover married couple, mixed couple, and unmarried couples, so the whole spectrum of marital status. Even though Paul tends to stay away off dictating moral behaviour, he is clearly expressing once in a while his expectations. This can be seen elsewhere

²²⁸ In Rom 12:6-8, Paul writes: “We have gifts (*χάρισμα*) that differ according to the grace (*χάρις*) given to us: prophecy, in proportion to faith; ministry, in ministering; the teacher, in teaching; the exhorter, in exhortation; the giver, in generosity; the leader, in diligence; the compassionate, in cheerfulness”. So *χάρισμα* covers all the actions of power.

²²⁹ Paul will clarify this point later on.

²³⁰ Henry George Liddell, Robert Scott, *μὲν*, in [A Greek-English Lexicon](#).

1 Cor 6:5 “I say (λέγω) this to your shame. Can it be that there is no one among you wise enough to decide between one believer and another” (lawsuits among Christians)

1 Cor 10:15 “I speak (λέγω) as to sensible people; judge for yourselves what I say” (to avoid eating meats offered to idols in the temple premises)

1 Cor 15:51 “Listen, I will tell (λέγω) you a mystery! We will not all die, but we will all be changed”

2 Cor 6:13 “In return — I speak (λέγω) as to children — open wide your hearts also” ... 2 Cor 7:3 “I do not say (λέγω) this to condemn you, for I said before that you are in our hearts, to die together and to live together” (Do not be mismatched with unbelievers)

2 Cor 8:8 “I do not say (λέγω) this as a command, but I am testing the genuineness of your love against the earnestness of others” (collection for the poor of Jerusalem)

2 Cor 11:16 “I repeat (λέγω), let no one think that I am a fool; but if you do, then accept me as a fool, so that I too may boast a little” ... 2 Cor 11:21 “To my shame, I must say (λέγω), we were too weak for that! But whatever anyone dares to boast of — I am speaking (λέγω) as a fool — I also dare to boast of that.” (Paul is addressing the issue of Judaizers in Corinth)

Phil 3:18 “For many live as enemies of the cross of Christ; I have often told (λέγω) you of them, and now I tell (λέγω) you even with tears” (Again, Paul is addressing the issue of Judaizers)²³¹

Gal 1:9 “As we have said before, so now I repeat (λέγω), if anyone proclaims to you a gospel contrary to what you received, let that one be accursed!” ... Gal 5:2 “Listen! I, Paul, am telling (λέγω) you that if you let yourselves be circumcised, Christ will be of no benefit to you” (Again, Paul is addressing the issue of Judaizers)

Rom 9:1 “I am speaking (λέγω) the truth in Christ — I am not lying; my conscience confirms it by the Holy Spirit” (Paul talks about God’s purposes toward Israel, his sadness that they are still not part of the body of Christ, and his hope that one day they will join in)

Rom 15:8 “For I tell (λέγω) you that Christ has become a servant of the circumcised on behalf of the truth of God in order that he might confirm the promises given to the patriarchs” (Paul talks about God’s plan, to which pagans are part of, inviting them to welcome one another)

Col 2:4 “I am saying (λέγω) this so that no one may deceive you with plausible arguments” (Again, Paul is addressing the issue of Judaizers)

When looking at all these verses where Paul is stressing his view through λέγω, we notice similar themes: the integrity of the body of Christ (lawsuits and sharing meals at the pagan temple have an impact on it, solidarity with the poor of Jerusalem and the missing Jewish people), and the core of Christian faith that relies totally on faith, not on the Jewish law as proposed by Judaizers). This is what matters for Paul. How does this shade light on 1 Cor 7? Paul doesn’t care about marriage or celibacy in itself. He cares about the core of Christian faith, mission and the body of Christ. And so these are his criteria to make decision.

ἀγάμοις is the masculine dative plural of ἄγαμος (not married). It only occurs here, four times in chapter 7, in the whole Bible. It refers to those not yet married, as well to those no longer married²³².

ταῖς χήραις is the feminine dative plural of χήρα (widow). In the Pauline corpus, this word occurs 9 times, one time here, and 8 times in 1 Tim. Why having a separate category for widows, after referring to nonmarried? Firstly, these women were usually under hardship, as in the ancient world subsistence were provided by men, so women rely totally on their spouse to have a living (widows and orphans were in the same category, see Exodus 22:21; Jas 1:27). In the Gospels, being a widow and being poor are almost synonymous (see Mk 12:41-44 || Lk 21:1-4; Mk 12:40 || Lk 20:47). Secondly, in the Church they belong to a specific category to be taken care of (for instance, see Acts 6:1). This is why the first letter to Timothy (not considered an authentic letter from most scholars) provides specific guidelines concerning a widow: she must be in a situation where she has no family support (1 Tim 5:4), she has been marry only once and has at least 60 years old (1 Tim 5:9), she is staying single (1 Tim 5:5) and “she must be well attested for her good works, as one who has brought up children, shown hospitality, washed the saints’ feet, helped the afflicted, and devoted herself to doing good in every way” (1 Tim 5:10). In this regard, with the support of the Church, Paul can ask them to remain single; otherwise, it would mean condemning them to hardship.

καλὸν αὐτοῖς ἔαν μείνωσιν ὡς κἀγώ ([it is] good for them if they stay like me). We have already analyzed καλός in v. 1 where we said that it refers to the goal of morality, the highest member of a series of lesser goods. As to μείνωσιν, the aorist active subjunctive 3rd plural of μένω (remain, stand fast), is well known verb in the New Testament and in the Pauline corpus (15 times), but its meaning of remaining in the same state as one is currently, only occurs in chapter 7 (5 times):

- v. 8 “good for them if they stay like me (μείνωσιν ὡς κἀγώ)”
- v. 11 “she should remain unmarried (μενέτω ἄγαμος)”
- v. 20 “Let each of you remain in the condition (ἐν ταύτῃ μενέτω) in which you were called”
- v. 24 “In whatever condition you were called, brothers and sisters, there remain with God (ἐν τούτῳ μενέτω παρὰ θεῶ)”
- v. 40 “But in my judgment she is more blessed if she remains as she is (οὕτως μείνη)”

In these five instances, one refers to unmarried people (v. 8), one to unmarried woman (v. 11), one to the religious condition in general (v. 20), one to the social condition in general (v. 24), and one to the widow (v. 40). We may wonder why Paul is asking not to change anything. In some cases, like widow and single women, the impact of staying single may mean hardship.

²³¹ See Murphy-O’Connor, op. cit., p. 229.

²³² Conzelmann, op. cit., p. 109, note 10.

But, as we have seen for widow, we can guess that solidarity and compassion in the community will take care of all those having hard time to make a living. In any event, Paul's answer will take place in part later on.

How to summarize our analysis? In v. 8, after concluding about marital relationship, Paul is making now a statement (λέγω) about unmarried people and widows, a status than can bring hardship to women, unless they are being taking care by the Christian community. But what exactly is the focus of his statement? The first part, i.e. v. 8 ([it is] good for them if they stay like me), or the second part, i.e. v. 9 (But if they cannot exercise self-control, then let them marry, for it is better to marry than to burn)? To answer this question, we would need the context, more specifically the Corinthians' letter. What exactly did they ask to have Paul bringing this answer? We said in our analysis of λέγω that Paul's focus when using this verb is integrity of the body of Christ, or the chore of the Christian faith. What is at stake here? A probable answer is the possibility of "burning" (v.9), in the same fashion when Paul brought the possibility of *πορνεία*. For if the driving force being the letter is an ascetic movement, then we could understand that both v. 1 (it is good for a man not to touch a woman) and v. 8 ([it is] good for [unmarried and widows] if they stay like [you]) are quotes from the letter. This view is supported by Hurd on grammatical ground²³³. But also, "It is unlikely that Paul would have independently reminded the Corinthians of this own celibacy"²³⁴. We need to conclude that the emphasis of λέγω is v. 9, and in v. 8 Paul is quoting the Corinthians' letter.

9. v. 9 If unable to self control, be married

εἰ δὲ οὐκ ἐγκρατεύονται, γαμησάτωσαν, κρεῖττον γάρ ἐστιν γαμῆσαι ἢ πυροῦσθαι (But if they cannot exercise self-control, then they should marry, for it is better to marry than burn)

εἰ δὲ οὐκ ἐγκρατεύονται (But if they cannot exercise self-control). *ἐγκρατεύονται* is the present middle voice indicative 3rd plural of *ἐγκρατεύομαι* (exercise self-control, force oneself to do a thing). In the whole New Testament, this verb is only found twice, here and in 1 Cor 9:25 (Athletes exercise self-control (*ἐγκρατεύομαι*) in all things; they do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable one). In the Old Testament, this verb is found only twice and has a similar meaning, forcing someone to do something (in 1 Sam 13:12 || LXX: 1 Kings 13:12: Saul forced himself and offered a burnt offering to Yahweh), and exercising self-control (in Gen 43:31, Joseph exercised control on his emotions and avoid crying when he saw his youngest brother Benjamin). So the verb conveys the idea of control on oneself and discipline. This is not the first time Paul is talking on self-control, as we retrieve the substantive in Gal 5:22-23: "The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (*ἐγκράτεια*)"²³⁵. Clearly, self-control stems from the Spirit. On this Conzelmann comments:

Since *ἐγκράτεια* is a charisma, it is not practices as a virtue. It is not a standard that has to be achieved and is measured by criteria of a general kind but is an individual gift which cannot be acquired by imitation. This is why it is possible both to make the concession *γαμησάτωσαν*, "let them marry," and to pass the considered judgment, *καλόν*, "it is well," or *κρεῖττον*, "it is better."²³⁶

γαμησάτωσαν is the aorist active imperative 3rd person plural of *γαμέω* (marry, take to wife, give oneself in marriage, give one's child in marriage) and *γαμῆσαι* is the aorist active infinitive of the same verb. In Paul's authentic letter, this chapter 7 is the only place where the apostle uses this word (9 times)²³⁷. Paul would never have talked on marriage if it had not been of the letter from Corinthians asking specific questions²³⁸. What is noteworthy in this chapter 7, Paul needs to state three times that whoever gets married, does not sin:

- 28a "But if you (a man) marry, you do not sin"
- 28b "if a virgin marries, she does not sin"
- 36 "let him (a man engaged with a fiancé) marry as he wishes; it is no sin. Let them marry"

Who would think that getting married is a sin? We have already mentioned ascetic tendencies in Corinth and groups like the Cynics were promoting celibacy²³⁹. The very fact that someone would raise the question of v. 1 (it is good to a man not to be touching a woman, is it not?) or v. 8 ([it is] good for [unmarried and widows] if they stay like [you]) reveals a feeling that there may be something wrong with marriage. Even though it doesn't seem that we are not facing a full-fledged Gnostic movement in Corinth²⁴⁰, we have the seed that will develop in the 2nd century and gave birth to the Encratites sect where one would

²³³ C. Hurd, *op. cit.*, p. 166, who notices that in v. 1 with *καλόν* (it is well) followed by a dative (for a man), and followed in v. 2 by *δὲ* (but), and v. 8 we have *καλόν* (it is well) followed by a dative (for them), and followed in v. 9 by *δὲ* (but).

²³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 167. On the contrary, Paul is always toning down Corinthians' statements.

²³⁵ There is as well the adjective *ἐγκρατής* found in Titus 1:8 ("but he (the bishop) must be hospitable, a lover of goodness, prudent, upright, devout, and self-controlled (*ἐγκρατής*)").

²³⁶ Conzelmann, *op. cit.*, p. 120.

²³⁷ In 1 Cor 7:38 Paul uses as well twice *γαμίζω* (give a daughter in marriage), but probably gives it the same meaning as *γαμέω* (see Conzelmann, *op. cit.*, p. 134-134, where the subject is not the father giving away his daughter, but the fiancé in a context of betrothal). *γαμέω* occurs three times in 1 Tim, a letter not considered authentic by most scholars.

²³⁸ Ephesians is out of scope as most scholars don't consider it from Paul's hand. See Michel Quesnel, *Saint Paul et les commencements du christianisme*, p. 135-140.

²³⁹ Conzelmann, *op. cit.*, p. 115.

²⁴⁰ This is the view of Conzelmann, *op. cit.*, p. 14-15, who writes: "Only there is no need of a fully developed Gnostic myth to account for it; nor are there any traces of such a myth in Corinth. We do not require this hypothesis to enable us to explain the text. We have to make a methodical distinction between ideas and concepts which *in themselves* are Gnostic and those which may have been taken over by Gnosticism

renounce marriage and abstain from flesh and wine. In this context, we can understand Paul stressing the fact that marriage is not a sin.

* * * * *

Excursus on Paul and marriage

Having said that, we need to recognize that, not only Paul never provides a positive view of marriage (besides avoiding *πορνεία*), he is also giving warnings about marriage:

- 28b “Yet those who marry will experience trouble (*θλίψις*) for the flesh, and I would spare you that”
- 33-34a “but the married man is concerned (*μεριμνάω*) about the affairs of the world, how to please (*ἀρέσκω*) his wife and his interests are divided (*μερίζω*)”
- 34c “but the married woman is concerned about the affairs of the world, how to please her husband”
- 40a “But in my judgment she (widow) is more blessed if she remains as she is” (and so the married woman is less blessed)

If we summarize Paul’s thought, he says that, on the individual level, the married person will experience distress (28b) and be less happy (40a), and on the Church level, he or she is divided, and so less devoted (33-34). The picture seems really negative. Let’s look more closely.

On the individual level, married people will experience *θλίψις* (hardship, pressure, oppression, affliction, distress, trouble) for the flesh. What exactly Paul means by this expression? The word *θλίψις* occurs 24 times in the Pauline corpus, and 14 times out of 24 it refers to Paul’s sufferings, usually due to opponents, adversary events and demands related to his mission: it is coupled with constraint or necessity (*ἀνάγκη*: 1 Thess 3:7), with prison’s chains (*δεσμός*: Phil 1:17), with anguish (*συνοχή*: 2 Cor 2:4), with calamities (*στενοχωρία*: 2 Cor 6:4), with persecution (*διωγμός*: Rom 8:35). But what is surprising, Paul seems to rejoice in what is happening to him: “but we also boast in our sufferings (*θλίψις*), knowing that suffering (*θλίψις*) produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not disappoint us, because God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us (Rom 5:3-5). And he even dares writing: “I am completing what is lacking in Christ’s afflictions (*θλίψις*) in my flesh for the sake of his body” (Col 1:24), i.e. because Christ lives through Paul’s life, and so Paul’s suffering contributes to the construction of the Church, the body of Christ²⁴¹. Obviously, married couple trouble in v. 28 has nothing to do with this meaning of *θλίψις*.

In 8 cases, *θλίψις* refers to what Christians are going through. This is what is happening in Thessalonica where believers welcomed the Gospel through persecutions (1 Thess 1:6; 2 Thess 1:4; 2 Cor 8:2). And it seems that this is the normal condition of a Christian (Rom 12: 12 “Rejoice in hope, be patient in suffering (*θλίψις*), persevere in prayer”). Again, married couple trouble in v. 28 has nothing to do with this meaning of *θλίψις*.

Finally, there is one case where *θλίψις* refers to what will be happening on the day where the world will undergo God’s judgment: “There will be tribulation (*θλίψις*) and distress (*στενοχωρία*) for everyone who does evil, the Jew first and also the Greek” (Rom 2:9). This is an echo of the last days as described in the Gospels: “But in those days, after that suffering (*θλίψις*), the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light” (Mk 13:24 | | Mt 24:29; see also Mt 13:19 | | Mt 24:21). Is Paul referring to this context when talking of the fate of married couple? For sure, he is referring to a future event: “those who marry will experience (*ἔξουσιν* is the future of *ἔχω*, to have) trouble”. Precision is coming with the next verses: “the appointed time has grown short” v. 29; “For the present form of this world is passing away” v. 31. So we need to conclude that, for Paul, the last days of this world will be harder for married couples²⁴². Why? On this, Senft writes: “La traversée des derniers temps sera plus difficile pour ceux qui auront à s’inquiéter du sort d’un conjoint et d’une famille, et Paul voudrait que ce surcroît de peine soit épargné aux fidèles”²⁴³. Probably, Paul imagines the worst for the last days, and he knows that seeing loved ones in this situation will be heart breaking. He says that this is what they will experience in “their flesh (*σάρξ*)”. We have seen different meaning of *σάρξ*, one of them being the characteristic of people in being part of history with its socio-economic condition, and the tensions of daily life. This is what will happen.

Could this explain why married people are less happy or less blessed (40a: “But in my judgment she (widow) is more blessed”)? Probably not, as Paul uses a verb in present tense in v. 40. Right now, the widow is blessed, and conversely, the married person is less blessed.

What about the statement that married couple is concerned (*μεριμνάω*) about the world (*κόσμος*), that spouse is focused on pleasing (*ἀρέσκω*) partner, and is divided (*μερίζω*), and so less devoted (*εὐπάρεδρος*) and is not without distractions (*ἀπερίσπαστος*) (33-35)?

but were of earlier origin and arose in a totally different speculative context. The concepts and motifs in 1 Corinthians belong without exception to the second group”.

²⁴¹ For the interpretation of Col 1:24, see Murphy-O’Connor, *op. cit.*, p. 239. *θλίψις* does not refer to Christ, but to Paul.

²⁴² Conzelmann writes on *θλίψις* in v. 28: “Here the eschatological sense is made perfectly clear by the future tense and the added statement in v. 29a.

²⁴³ *Op. cit.*, p. 103.

Let's start by trying to understand what Paul means by being concerned. The verb *μεριμνάω* (be anxious about, care for, meditate upon) occurs 8 times in the Pauline corpus, and can have either a positive tone, either a negative one. It is a positive attitude when Paul refers to the Church, using the image of the body, and saying: "the members may have the same care (*μεριμνάω*) for one another" (1 Cor 12:25), or refers to the behaviour of Timothy (Phil 2:20 "I have no one like him who will be genuinely concerned (*μεριμνάω*) for your welfare"). In a similar fashion, using the substantive *μέριμνα*, he will describe his own behaviour: "I am under daily pressure because of my concern (*μέριμνα*) for all the churches" (2 Cor 11:28). But in other cases, it is a negative attitude to the point where he invites the community to avoid worries: "Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God" (Phil 4:6). The context suggests that worries were the source of the conflict between Euodia and Syntyche, and they prevent rejoicing and gentleness to everyone, and as well tanksgiving prayer and peace of mind (Phil 4:2-7).

In the Sapiential tradition, we find the same ambiguity with respect to *μεριμνάω* or *μέριμνα*. On the one hand, it refers to an exemplary attitude, like the one found with the potter (Sir 38:29 "So it is with the potter sitting at his work and turning the wheel with his feet; he is always deeply concerned (*μεριμνάω*) over his products, and he produces them in quantity"), or as a general behaviour (Prov 14:23 "With every one who is careful (*μεριμνάω*) there is abundance: but the pleasuring and indolent shall be in want"). But on the hand, it may make our life miserable, for instance concerns for possession (Sir 31:1 "Wakefulness over wealth wastes away one's flesh, and anxiety (*μεριμνάω*) about it drives away sleep").

In the Gospels, *μεριμνάω* and *μέριμνα* have always a negative tone: Jesus asks not to worry about our life, about what we will eat or drink or wear or about tomorrow (Mt 6:25-34 || Lk 12:22-26), not to worry about how we are to speak or what we are to say when we will be handed over (Mt 10:19 || Lk 12:11), as worrying cannot add a single hour to our span of life (Mt 6:27 || Lk 12:25-26); moreover, worries can choke the word of God: "but the cares of the world (*μέριμναι τοῦ αἰῶνος*), and the lure of wealth, and the desire for other things come in and choke the word, and it yields nothing" (Mk 4:19 || Lk 8:14 || Mt 13:22).

If we come back to 1 Cor 7, we find the same ambiguity noticed elsewhere in Paul's writings and in the Sapiential tradition. *μεριμνάω* is a positive attitude when the unmarried man is concerned about the affairs of the Lord (7:32) or the unmarried woman and the virgin are concerned about the affairs of the Lord (7:34). On the other hand, it is a negative attitude when the married man is concerned about the affairs of the world (7:33) or the married woman is concerned about the affairs of the world (7:34). So is concern good or bad?²⁴⁴ Paul adds to this ambiguity when he says: "I want you to be free from concerns (*ἀμέριμνος*) (7:32). The latter adjective is unique in the whole Pauline corpus, and it is found in the Old Testament²⁴⁵ only in the book of Wisdom where to be free of concerns is the privilege of the wise man (6:15 "one who is vigilant on her account will soon be free from care") who is filled with the spirit of wisdom that allows him to be "beneficent, humane, steadfast, sure, free from anxiety" (7:23). It is not impossible that Paul, being aware of the wise man model, would like Corinthians to follow the same path. But the context suggests something different. For the concern that he considers negatively is related to the world, *κόσμος*.

κόσμος (order, good order, order of things, government, ornament, decoration (of woman), ruler, regulator, world), a word that occurs 47 times in the Pauline corpus. Because of its connotation of order, it referred in the classical Greek to military troops (Homer, *Iliad*, XII, 225)²⁴⁶ or anything well organized. In the Septuagint, it refers either to beautiful ornament (1 Sam 1:24), or the hosts of heaven (Deut 4:19). It is only in Hellenistic period that *κόσμος* started referring to our universe (Wisdom, Sirach, Maccabees). This is where we find Paul. According to Conzelmann, *κόσμος* in Paul means: "(a) it is creation and as such transient; (b) it is *fallen* creation and hostile to God."²⁴⁷ When reading carefully the Pauline corpus, we can split both (a) and (b) in two groups each to be more precise: in (a), the creation can refer to the physical reality, or it can refer to the intelligent portion of the creation, including angels; in (b), humanity can refer to society with its set of values and behaviour, or it can refer explicitly to humanity as hostile against God. Namely:

- (a)₁ *κόσμος*, as a the physical reality, is the expression of God's power, visible to all (Rom 1, 20); because of his faith, Abraham received the promise to inherit this world (Rom 4:13); but it is not something that is supposed to last, it is time bound and will shortly disappeared, and we should not invest too much in it (1 Cor 7:31)
- (a)₂ the physical reality is the arena of both men and angels (1 Cor 4:9), with numerous languages (1 Cor 14:10), an arena where Roman community faith is proclaimed (Rom 1:8) and where Gospel is growing (Col 1:6), but at the same time an arena where Paul and his partners look like scum (1 Cor 4:13)

²⁴⁴ We disagree with D.L. Balch, *1 Cor. 7.32-35 and Stoic Debat about Marriage, Anxiety and Distraction*, in *JBL* 102(1983)435, who follows C.K. Barrett (*A Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians*, p. 178-182), who "argues that "anxiety" (*μεριμνάω*, *ἀμέριμνος*) as used here by Paul is *uniformly* negative". How anxiety for the affairs of the Lord be negative? How Paul's daily anxiety for the churches be negative? It is possible that *μεριμνάω* and *ἀμέριμνος* are borrowed from the Stoic vocabulary, but not the philosophy that comes with it.

²⁴⁵ In the New Testament, besides 1 Cor 7:32, it is found only in Mt 28:14, but in a totally different context (the high priests tell the soldiers not to worry about the lye they are about to tell).

²⁴⁶ Pierre Létourneau, *Kosmos*, in *Nouveau vocabulaire biblique*. Paris-Montréal : Bayard-Médiaspaul, 2004, p. 423.

²⁴⁷ Conzelmann, *op. cit.*, p. 43.

- (b)₁ *κόσμος* designates as well the human society with its set of values and behaviour, and unfortunately, it has been twisted and distorted by the power of sin (Rm 5:12), and so is full of immoral and avaricious people, robbers and idolaters (1 Cor 5:10); in this world believers are shining like stars in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation (Phil 2:15)
- (b)₂ Paul sometimes emphasizes the conflict or the incompatibility between the world and God by writing that God made foolish the wisdom of the world (1 Cor 1:20), he chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong (1 Cor 1:27); therefore, Christians have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit that is from God (1 Cor 2:12); this world is a slavery from which the believer is freed (Ga 4:3; 6:14), and should not go back to this slavery (Col 2:20); this is why God through the saints will judge this world (1 Co 6:2; Rom 3:6), and this world will be condemned (1 Cor 11:32; Rm 3:19); this is why Christ came to reconcile the world to God, so that believers could become a new creation (2 Cor 5:17-19).

We can say that the world as defined in (a) is either neutral or positive, but negative as defined in (b). Obviously, when Paul says that the married man or woman is concerned about the affairs of the world, he refers to what we have said in (b). Unfortunately, he does not provide many details about the negative impact on being involved in the world. Mark 4:19 (“but the cares of the world (*μέριμναι τοῦ αἰῶνος*), and the lure of wealth, and the desire for other things come in and choke the word, and it yields nothing”), in describing the fate the word of God being preached in different grounds, may provide a hint, especially when *αἰών* is synonym of *κόσμος*, as it is the case in Paul, like 1 Cor 1:20: “Where is the one who is wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age (*αἰών*)? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world (*κόσμος*)”²⁴⁸. But there is also a verse in Luke that could shade light on the first century Christian community:

Be on guard so that your hearts are not weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness and the worries (*μέριμνα*) of this life (*βιωτικός*), and that day does not catch you unexpectedly (21:34)

First, we are in a similar eschatological context as referred by Paul in 1 Cor 7:29. Then it refers to the worries of this life (*βιωτικός*). The only other occurrences of this adjective used as a substance in the whole Bible is in 1 Cor 6:3-4: “Do you not know that we are to judge angels — How much more, things that pertain to this life (*βιωτικός*)? If then, you have to judge things pertaining to this life (*βιωτικός*), do you set them to judge who are of no account in the assembly?” This seems an example where Christians were involved in the world through court procedures. As Corinth was a harbour and a prosperous city where people were conducting business and need to be selfish and have a “cut throat” mentality to be successful, it is possible in Paul’s view that such involvement in the world were negatively impacting Christian life, as going to court shows. Having said that, the question remains: why is the danger of being concerned by the world specific to married people? Why unmarried people would not *per se* be anxious about the affairs of the world? We need to dig further.

After lamenting on concerns about the affairs of the world, Paul continues with the same negative tone: “(the married man is concerned about) how to please (*ἀρέσκω*) his wife”. This verb *ἀρέσκω* (to please) is paulinian (14 times)²⁴⁹. It usually appears in a context where there is a dichotomy. There are two types of dichotomies, me against others, and man against God.

- Paul didn’t try to please himself, but sought the interest of others (1 Cor 10:33 “just as I try to please (*ἀρέσκω*) everyone in everything I do, not seeking my own advantage, but that of many”); Christ himself had the same behaviour (Rom 15:3 “For Christ did not please (*ἀρέσκω*) himself; but, as it is written, ‘The insults of those who insult you have fallen on me’”); and so Paul is asking all Christians to do the same (Rom 15:2 “Each of us must please (*ἀρέσκω*) our neighbor for the good purpose of building up the neighbour”)
- The man against God dichotomy is presented for the first time by Paul in his first letter to the Thessalonians²⁵⁰ where he is facing a community persecuted by their own compatriots and to whom he writes: “they (persecutors) are not pleasing (*ἀρέσκω*) God and oppose everyone by hindering us from speaking to the Gentiles so that they may be saved” (1 Thess 2:15-16), and this is why Paul himself, approved by God to be entrusted with the message of the gospel, does not try “to please (*ἀρέσκω*) mortals” (1 Thess 2:4); to the Galatians who let the Judaizers convince them to go back to the practice of the law, jeopardizing the belief of salvation through faith, Paul proposes his own behaviour: “Am I now seeking human approval, or God’s approval? Or am I trying to please (*ἀρέσκω*) people? If I were still pleasing (*ἀρέσκω*) people, I would not be a servant of Christ (Gal 1:10); finally, in his letter to the Romans to whom he presented his view of two regimes, one under the power of Sin, a society twisted and distorted by the power of evil, a regime “in the flesh” or a failed humanity, and one under the Spirit of Christ accessible through faith, Paul can write: “those who are in the flesh cannot please (*ἀρέσκω*) God” (Rom 8:8).

What this analysis tells us, *ἀρέσκω* is used for serious matters, i.e. of almost life and death with respect to Christian life²⁵¹. So how this can shade light on Paul’s statement in 1 Cor 7:33-34 (the married people care about how to please (*ἀρέσκω*) their partner)? It must be serious matters, as we have a dichotomy with the other statement: unmarried men, women and virgins are concerned about the affairs of the Lord, how to please the Lord (32-34). The dichotomy is between the Lord and world/partner, as pleasing the partner is in apposition to being concerned by the world (v. 32 and v.34), i.e. pleasing the

²⁴⁸ Conzelmann, *op. cit.*, p. 43, writes when commenting 1 Cor 1:20: “ὁ αἰὼν οὗτος, ‘this age,’ means the same as ὁ κόσμος οὗτος, ‘this world,’ and likewise the simple ὁ κόσμος, ‘the world’.

²⁴⁹ Elsewhere it occurs only in Mk 6:22 (copied by Mt 14:6) and Acts 6:5.

²⁵⁰ According to Murphy-O’Connor, *op. cit.*, p. 106, the first letter to Thessalonians contains in fact three letters, and letter A contains 1 Thess 2:13 – 4:2).

²⁵¹ We are far from our modern view where pleasing a spouse would mean giving what he or she wants.

spouse is synonymous to being concerned by the world who is in conflict with God. And so what we have seen on Paul's statement about *ἀρέσκω* in 1 Thess, Gal and Rom should cover partners as well. How is this possible? How the apostle who relied heavily on Aquila and Prisca, first in Corinth, where they provided him with a base, then in Ephesus where they prepared the ground for his ministry, and finally in Rome where they were sent in anticipation of his arrival²⁵², how could he say now that pleasing the spouse is being concerned with the world who is against God? Paul was certainly aware that a Christian couple can help each other in living their faith. So, we need to make an assumption here: the spouse whom he is referring to is not Christian²⁵³. Such an assumption makes sense in a world where Christians are a minority, and there is more chance to have non-Christian partner than a Christian one. But can we go further than saying "it makes sense" and find somehow a confirmation of this assumption? Let's dig more.

After talking about unmarried woman and virgins being concerned about the affairs of the Lord, Paul writes: "so that they may be holy in body and spirit (*ἵνα ἡ ἅγια καὶ τῷ σώματι καὶ τῷ πνεύματι*)" (7:34). What does he mean by being holy? We know that in the Jewish world, holiness is an attribute of God, and so holiness can only come from God. In the Pauline corpus, there are three words related to holiness: the adjective *ἅγιος* (holy) (76 times), the verb *ἁγιάζω* (sanctify)(8 times), and the noun *ἁγιασμός* (sanctification) (8 times). Occurrences of *ἅγιος* can be grouped in three categories.

- It refers to God (16 times), especially through the Holy Spirit (for instance, 1 Cor 6:19 "Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you")
- But over 50% (43 times), the adjective is used as a substantive to designate the members of the Christian community (for instance, 1 Cor 6:1 "When any of you has a grievance against another, do you dare to take it to court before the unrighteous, instead of taking it before the saints?"); as we can see, being a saint in this case is not a personal achievement, but the default reality of a believer, as unrighteous is the default reality of an unbeliever
- Finally, when used as an adjective (17 times) outside specific reference to God, it qualifies miscellaneous entities, including brotherly kiss (1 Cor 16:20 "holy kiss"), Scripture (Rom 1:2), the Law and the commandment (Rom 7:12), the call to believe (2 Tim 1:9). But in a few cases, it qualifies the believer, especially in Rom 12:1-2, that we need to examine more closely:

1 I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies (*σῶμα*) as a living sacrifice, holy (*ἅγιος*) and well-pleasing (*εὐάρεστος*) to God, which is your spiritual worship. 2 Do not be conformed to this world (*αἰών*), but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God — what is good and well-pleasing (*εὐάρεστος*) and perfect.

In these two verses, Paul presents the core of the Christian life. Holiness is not an achievement, but the result of believing and the *χάρις* of God through Christ (here presented as mercies). But at the same time, this *χάρις* needs to grow, and Paul uses the image of body offered as a sacrifice, i.e the whole of the human being dying to the old man and becoming gradually the new man (renewing of minds) by discerning in an ongoing manner the will of God, how to please him. In order to do that, the Christian needs to avoid the world. We have here to same vocabulary as we have seen in 1 Cor 7:33-34: *σῶμα* (body), *ἅγιος* (holy), *εὐάρεστος* (well-pleasing) a parent word of *ἀρέσκω* (to please), *αἰών* (world, age), a synonym of *κόσμος*. And the idea is the same: unmarried woman and virgins need to avoid the world through marriage, in order to let holiness received through faith grow in their life (body and spirit)²⁵⁴ by pleasing the Lord through discerning his will. Again, why could marriage refer to the world, if not through a partner who is an unbeliever²⁵⁵?

This view is confirmed when we look at Paul usage of the verb *ἁγιάζω* (to sanctify): only God is able to sanctify (1 Thess 5:23), he does it through Christ (1 Cor 1:2). But it seems also that God can sanctify through a Christian (1 Cor 7:14) partner, but it seems there is a difference between sanctity and salvation (1 Cor 7:16)²⁵⁶. Because this is far from certain, the Christian who is unmarried should stay away from a marriage with an unbeliever, and to be safer, from marriage itself. This view is also confirmed with the noun *ἁγιασμός* (sanctification), often synonymous of *δικαιοσύνη* (righteousness), brought by Christ (1 Cor 1:30), but in order to do a follow up of this new state, the Christian needs to abstain from promiscuity (*πορνεία*)(1 Thess 4:3), to stay away from impurity (1 Thess 4:7), iniquity (Rom 6:19), everything brought by the world through the unbeliever partner. This view is summarized by Murphy-O'Connor in the following way:

The lifestyle of believers is qualified as 'sanctification' (1 Thess 4:3.7), which in the first place does not denote personal sanctity but rather having been 'set apart' by God, and thereby 'dedicated' to God. Christians are 'saints in virtue of a divine call' (Rom 1:7; 1 Cor 1: 2; cf. 2 Cor 1:1; Phil 1:1; Col 1:20); the complete absence of 'saint' in Galatians underlines that in Paul's lexicon it is anything but a banal formula. The alternative to 'sanctification' is

²⁵² On Aquila and Prisca's role in Paul's mission, see Murphy-O'Connor, *op. cit.*, p. 328.

²⁵³ We tend to disagree with Conzelmann, *op. cit.*, p. 134, who writes on 1 Cor 7:32-33: "The mode of expression is here purely ascetic, to 'please' the Lord *or* the world, as the representative of which the marriage partner functions. It will of course be asked how far the phrasing is over sharpened *ad hoc*." In our view, it is possible to find ascetic trend in Paul, but what is at stake here is not ascetism.

²⁵⁴ This is as well the view of Senft, *op. cit.*, p. 105, note 6: "*σῶμα* et *πνεῦμα* désignent la totalité de l'homme: être saint tout entire. Bultmann, *Theol. NT*, P. 206.

²⁵⁵ Again, we disagree with Conzelmann, *op. cit.*, p. 134, who writes about 1 Cor 7:34: "The ascetic tendency is plain. But here, too, it is not elevated into a principle." In our view, Paul is not promoting ascetism, but an environment where faith can grow.

²⁵⁶ See later on our analysis of 1 Cor 7:14.16.

described as *porneia* (v. 3) and *akatharsia* (v. 7). The latter means ‘uncleanness’ and is the antithesis of ‘sanctification’ used in the cultic sense just defined. Thus, for a Jew it functioned as the definition of a pagan lifestyle²⁵⁷.

So, why Paul is concerned about marriage? It seems that Paul has nothing against marriage in itself. His concern is related to the unbeliever partner who belongs to a world where there is *porneia* (promiscuity) and *akatharsia* (uncleanliness). His concern is so great that, as we shall see in 1 Cor 7:15, he allows the possibility of divorce. All in all, is Paul an ascetic, as stated by Conzelmann, or is he a realistic? All the evidence points in the direction of a realistic man.

We may have a final confirmation with Paul’s statement that married woman is divided (*μερίζω*), and so less devoted (*εὐπάρεδρος*) and is not without distractions (*ἀπερίσπαστος*) (1 Cor 7:33-34). The verb *μερίζω* occurs five times in Paul’s letters and have two main meanings: 1) to divide, to separate into parts, to cut into pieces, to be split up, to be dispersed; 2) to distribute, to assign a part, to allot, to bestow. In a way, the two meanings are close, for in order to distribute or share something, one needs to divide it, like a loaf of bread. But the context may give a positive or a negative meaning to the word. In 1 Cor, both positive and negative meanings are found. In 1 Cor 7:17 Paul writes: “let each of you lead the life that the Lord has assigned (*μερίζω*), to which God called you”; in a positive way, each of us has received from the Lord a specific share in life. On the other hand, in 1 Cor 1:13: “Has Christ been divided (*μερίζω*)? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul?”; Paul is blasting the Corinthians for their quarrels or the existing of factions that are generating conflicts. The context of 1 Cor 7:33-34 is a negative one, as Paul is asking to say away from marriage because this will create *μερίζω*, i.e. the person will be divided, split up. This echoes the situation of 1 Cor 1:13 with all the factions. We can have a feel of the full meaning of this verb in Mk 3:26: “And if Satan has risen up against himself and is divided (*μερίζω*), he cannot stand, but his end has come”. The conflict or opposition that the married woman will encounter is not a minor one. It is a conflict of values and world view, which is only possible if the spouse is an unbeliever²⁵⁸.

What is the impact of division? It prevents from being *εὐπάρεδρος* (v. 35). The latter is an adjective that is found nowhere in the whole Bible other than here, and it means: sitting constantly by, assiduous, constantly attending. In fact, the parent verb of this adjective is the verb *ἐδράζω* (cause to sit, place), found a few times in the Sapiential literature: Wis 4:3 “But the prolific brood of the ungodly will be of no use, and none of their illegitimate seedlings will strike a deep root or take a firm hold (*ἐδράζω*)”; Sir 22:17 “A heart settled (*ἐδράζω*) upon a thought of understanding is as a fair plastering on the wall of a gallery”. As we can see, the idea is to have a firm stance, a solid position. *εὐπάρεδρος* is based on a firm stance, on a direction from which one does not deviate. This is the case of someone who embraces faith and stays away from other world views. The adverb *ἀπερίσπαστος* (without distraction, without solicitude, uninterrupted, not hindered) follows logically. There is no counter-position, which would be the case with another values system supported by a spouse who is an unbeliever. The adverb is found nowhere in the whole Bible, except here, but once again, we find the adjective *ἀπερίσπαστος* in the Sapiential literature: Sir 41:1 “O death, how bitter is the thought of you to the one at peace among possessions, who has nothing to worry about (*ἀπερίσπαστος*) and is prosperous in everything, and still is vigorous enough to enjoy food!” Staying single avoid being drawn into another world incompatible with the Christian faith.

* * * * *

After this excursus on Paul and marriage, let’s go back to v. 9: *κρείττον γάρ ἐστιν γαμῆσαι ἢ πυροῦσθαι* (for it is better to marry than burn). *κρείττον* is the comparative adjective neutral nominative singular of *κρείσσω* (stronger, mightier, better, more excellent). In the moral realm, it is a way to state that, amongst different goods, some are better than others. Paul used this expression four times. For instance, he states “he who marries his fiancée does well; and he who refrains from marriage will do better (*κρείσσω*)” (1 Cor 7:38), or “I am hard pressed between the two (living in the flesh or dying and living with Christ): my desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better (*κρείσσω*)” (Phil 1:23)²⁵⁹.

πυροῦσθαι is the present middle voice/passive infinitive of *πυρόω* (to burn, to burn with fire, to burn up, to set on fire, to kindle, to inflame, to be ignited, to produce fire, to be proved or tested by fire). It is found three times in the Pauline corpus: besides v. 9 there is 2 Cor 11:29 “Who is weak, and I am not weak? Who is made to stumble, and I am not burn inwardly (*πυρόω*)?” and Eph 6:16 “With all of these, take the shield of faith, with which you will be able to quench all the flaming (*πυρόω*) arrows of the evil one”. All these don’t give us much insight on what Paul means by “burning” if one doesn’t marry. The NRSV translation of 1 Pet 4:12 is more helpful: “Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal that is taking place among you to test (*πυρόω*) you, as though something strange were happening to you”. In fact, since Antiquity fire was used in the mining world to test the quality of mineral and reveal gold or silver: “And I will bring the third part through the fire, and I will try (*πυρόω*) them as silver is tried (*πυρόω*), and I will prove (*δοκιμάζω*) them as gold is proved (*δοκιμάζω*): they shall call upon my name, and I will hear them, and say, This is my people: and they shall say, The Lord is my God” (LXX: Zech 13:9). This use of *πυρόω* to refer to test is widely spread in the Old Testament: for instance, “For thou, O God, has proved (*δοκιμάζω*) us; thou hast tried (*πυρόω*) us with fire as silver is tried (*πυρόω*)” (LXX: Ps 65:10). We find a similar usage in Paul with the word

²⁵⁷ Murphy-O’Connor, *op. cit.*, p. 124.

²⁵⁸ Paul would not use *μερίζω* about dress code or any trivial disagreement of daily life.

²⁵⁹ This style of using comparisons to stress what is morally better is not used elsewhere in the New Testament, except in the Epistle to the Hebrews, and in a single instance in 1 and 2 Pet. But it has been heavily used in the Sapiential literature. For instance, “Better is the worker who has goods in plenty than the boaster who lacks bread” (Sir 10:27). See Sir 16:3, Sir 18:16, Sir 19:24, Sir 20:31, Sir 29:22, Sir 30:14, Sir 30:17, Sir 33:22, Sir 36:21, Sir 40:28, Sir 41:15, Sir 42:14.

fire (πῦρ): “the work of each builder will become visible, for the Day will disclose it, because it will be revealed with fire (πῦρ), and the fire (πῦρ) will test (δοκιμάζω) what sort of work each has done” (1 Cor. 3:13). And so the verbs *πυρῶ* (burn), *δοκιμάζω* (test) and *πειράζω* (try, test, tempt) can be synonymous. What Paul is saying here is similar to what he has said earlier in v. 5: “Do not deprive one another... in order for the Satan not to tempt (*πειράζω*) you through the debility of yours”. What is clear, in Paul’s view, staying alone creates a testing environment where the danger of *πορνεία* (promiscuity, fornication, unchastity, prostitution) is not far²⁶⁰.

The similarity between the beginning and the end of section 1 Cor 7:1-9 suggests to C. Hurd that it contains not one, but two questions from the Corinthians, as we stated in our analysis of v. 8.

1-2: It is well (*καλόν*) for a man (dative) not touch a woman. But (*δέ*) because of immorality, each man should have (fully) his own wife...

8-9: It is well (*καλόν*) for them (dative) to remain (single) as I do. But (*δέ*) if they cannot exercise self-control, they should marry²⁶¹.

The first question would apply to marriage in general as well as to marital intercourse, and the second question would refer to Paul marital status and presenting it a model to follow. And so Hurd concludes:

Behind 1 Cor 7:1-9 stand two topics from the Corinthians’ letter: (i) the question of sexual intercourse for the married, and (ii) of marriage for the unmarried. Concerning the first (and probably the second as well) the Corinthians had said, “It is best for a man not to touch a woman”. Concerning the second they may have said, “It is best that they remain as you are.”²⁶²

So, we agree with Hurd that the Corinthians’ letter contained more than one question related to marriage and sexuality, even though it hard to know the exact phrasing.

But what is clear, Paul elected to respond by using the pastoral approach. There is no one size fits all, and Paul stays away from any theory or dogma. Everyone is unique, and each one needs to assess his or her capacity, which Paul defines in term of *χάρισμα* (gift from the Spirit). So Christian life is not a matter of ideal, but of *δοκιμάζω* (to vet, to scrutinize), and first and above all of vetting oneself: “Examine yourselves” (1 Cor 11:28; 2 Cor 13:5; and with a different twist Gal 6:4 “All must test their own work”). A group of Corinthians, often called spirit-people²⁶³, seemed to believe that the goal of a perfect Christian was already established, including some kind of asceticism and a mimic of the glorified state. Paul had to bring them back to reality and the need for a vetting process. This process will be explained in full later on in Rom 12:2:

Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern (*δοκιμάζω*) what is the will of God — what is good and acceptable and perfect.

But one thing is not negotiable: staying away from *πορνεία*. Why? This stems from Paul’s notion of body (*σῶμα*) that he explained earlier in 1 Cor 6:12-20. The body is not like the belly, it defines the whole person, it allows relationship with the others, and through sexual intercourse two bodies become one body, in a similar manner to the way a believer becomes one spirit with the Lord: they share the same view, they share the same love. Through *πορνεία* with a prostitute or any immoral sexual action, the believer becomes one body with the pagan world (*κόσμος*), this set of values and behaviours incompatible with the Christian community. We can understand Paul asking the believer to glorify God through the body (1 Cor 6:20), as the body is the temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor 6:19) and member of Christ (1 Cor 6:15), and God will resurrect it as he resurrected the Lord (1 Cor 6:14). Therefore, as long as marriage prevents *πορνεία*, it will always be preferable than trying to avoid sexual intercourse or staying single for those who didn’t receive the right gift from the Spirit (*χάρισμα*). Moreover, it gives the opportunity of a loving surrender to each other, as a spouse doesn’t own his or her own body.

Paul pastoral care shows up as well in the type of environment he would like to see Christians involved in: an environment without worries. Worries are here described in terms of being split up between the world revealed by Christ with self-sacrificing love and the world of pagans led by egoism, conflicts and competition. And in a world where Christians are a minority, the risk of being pulled in this pagan world by marriage is very high, hence Paul’s warning.

B. 7: 10-16: Marital union

1. v. 10 Message to the unmarried woman

Τοῖς δὲ γεγαμηκόσιν παραγγέλλω, οὐκ ἐγὼ ἀλλ’ ὁ κύριος, γυναῖκα ἀπὸ ἀνδρός μὴ χωρισθῆναι (But to the married I send this message; - not I but the lord – a wife should not be separated from a husband)

²⁶⁰ Conzelmann, *op. cit.*, p. 120, note 13, sees in “burn” a “figure of (sexual) passion”, which possible on top of the testing figure.

²⁶¹ C. Hurd, *op. cit.*, p. 166.

²⁶² *Ibid.*, p. 167.

²⁶³ This is how Murphy-O’Connor, *op. cit.*, p. 280, coins these Christian whom he defines as a group “whose members believed that their possession of ‘wisdom’ made them perfect”. For Murphy-O’Connor, “the spirit-people were at the root of the problems dealt with in 13 of the 16 chapters of 1 Corinthians.

Τοῖς δὲ γεγαμηκόσιν (But to the married). *γεγαμηκόσιν* is the perfect active participle masculine dative plural of *γαμέω* (to marry), literally: those having married in the past. The dative introduces the idea of “about”, a new topic, confirmed by *δέ*, a particule translated here as “But”. In fact, it is not really a new topic, as Paul has already discussed about married couples in v. 2-6. But it seems a new topic triggered by a specific question from the Corinthians’ letter²⁶⁴. In fact, Paul is not presenting here some general marital principles but addressing a real case in Corinth²⁶⁵.

παραγγέλλω (I send this message). This verb is the concatenation of the the preposition *παρά* (beside), and the verb *ἀγγέλλω* (announce, report), and it means: to declare, announce, command, order, charge, recommend, exhort). It occurs 12 times in the Pauline corpus. But of these 12 occurrences, 5 come from 1 Tim, which most scholars do not consider as coming directly from Paul’s hand. So, with only 7 occurrences in Paul’s authentic letters, one tends to conclude that, in fact, the apostle does not make a lot of authoritative statements. In our analysis, we could add the noun *παραγγελία* (charge, command) and the synonymous verb *διατάσσω* (to prescribe, ordain, give order), and so the 7 occurrences of a prescription will reach the number 13 in Paul’s authentic letters, if we eliminate one occurrence where it is a quote from the Septuagint. So what exactly is Paul prescribing?

- That you abstain from fornication (*πορνεία*) (1 Thess 4:2)
- To aspire to live quietly, to mind your own affairs and to work with your hands (1 Thess 4:11)
- To keep away from believers who are living in idleness and not according to the tradition that they received from us... Anyone unwilling to work should not eat... to do their work quietly and to earn their own living (2 Thess 3:6.10.12)
- A wife should not be separated from husband (1 Cor 7:10)
- Let each of you lead the life that the Lord has assigned, to which God called you (1 Cor 7:17)
- Indirect reference to women hairdo in the assembly and the eucharist not being a place to be drunk (1 Cor 11:17.34)
- Concerning the collection for the saints: you should follow the directions I gave to the churches of Galatia (1 Cor 16:1)

Paul is rarely authoritative and formulates very few rules. And when he puts forward some rules or prescribes something, it is usually when addressing specific situation, mainly to avoid disorder: avoiding *πορνεία* and idleness, overthrowing the social order and expected social behaviour, drunkenness in the community. If this is the case, then we can expect that Paul is as well addressing some kind of disorder in v. 10.

οὐκ ἐγὼ ἀλλ’ ὁ κύριος (not I but the Lord). The word *κύριος* (Lord) occurs 261 times in the Pauline corpus, and it is often combined with *χριστός* (Christ), or *Ἰησοῦς* (Jesus), but often it stands as well alone. The word *κύριος* in itself conveys a sense of authority and power, and for a Christian, it means that life is totally under the direction of the Lord. Now, after starting his sentence with “I send this message”, Paul changes his mind and switch to the Lord authority. We have an echo of the fact that Paul was probably dictating to a scribe, and while talking, just happened to remember a tradition on Jesus preaching. Of course, referring in such fashion to the Lord gives more weigh to what he is about to say. But what is surprising, the way Paul is communicating the word of the Lord seems totally new to the Corinthians; we don’t have the formula used in the beginning of 1 Cor 15 “Now I would remind you, brothers and sisters”. So we need to assume that, up to this point, Corinthians didn’t receive any guidance on divorce, and since the community’s foundation four years ago, a few divorces may have taken place.

Words of Jesus are rarely found in Paul. Elsewhere we can find:

- “In the same way, the Lord commanded that those who proclaim the gospel should get their living by the gospel” (1 Cor 9:15)
- “For this we declare to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will by no means precede those who have died” (1 Thess 4:15)

In 1 Cor 11:13, Paul writes: “For I received from the Lord what I also handed on to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took a loaf of bread”. The latter refers more to the Church tradition that specific words of Jesus. In any event, Paul refers to the word of the Lord when there is a need to address an issue: the issue of being sponsored or not in his ministry, the issue of people starting to die before the Lord is coming back, the issue of Eucharist looking like a pagan meal, and here, the issue of divorce.

γυναῖκα ἀπὸ ἀνδρός μὴ χωρισθῆναι (a wife should not be separated from a husband). There have been lots of discussions around *χωρισθῆναι*, the aorist passive infinitive of *χωρίζω* (to separate, divide, part, put asunder, depart, go away, divorce), and as well around the whole verse.

- First, there is the fact of an aorist passive verb, the aorist expressing a completed action. How can the divorce be in the past and the woman be a passive subject? This fact does not harmonize with v. 13 where we have an active voice for divorce (*ἀφιέτω* is the present active imperative of *ἀφίημι*) and the wife initiates the action. So, most Bibles translate using the present tense: “the wife should not separate from her husband” (NRSV); “que la femme ne se sépare pas de son mari” (TOB). And a scribe thought in the same way by replacing *χωρισθῆναι* with *χωρίζεσθαι* (the present passive/middle voice infinitive of *χωρίζω*)²⁶⁶. But is reading v. 10 in light of v. 13 the right approach?

²⁶⁴ This is the opinion of Senft, *op. cit.*, p. 91.

²⁶⁵ This is the whole point of Murphy-O’Connor, *The Divorced Woman in 1 Cor 7:10-11*, *JournBibLit*, 100 (1981)601-606.

²⁶⁶ For this variant, see our analysis of v. 10b in our Textual Critique section.

- ii. When Paul discusses marital relationship and stating some kind of rule, he always starts with the man, before moving in a parallel way to the woman.
 - v. 2 each man should have his own wife / each woman her own husband
 - v. 3 Let the husband render what is due to the wife / [let] the wife [render what is due] to the husband
 - v. 12-13 if any brother has an unbelieving wife / if a wife has unbelieving husband
 - v. 14 the unbelieving husband has been made holy / the unbelieving wife has been made holy

So, if Paul is really stating here a rule, why is he not following his usual approach? Why this sudden exception where he talks first about the wife?²⁶⁷

- iii. In order to resolve the inconsistencies between v. 10 and v. 13-15, some scholars have proposed to interpret *ἀφίημι* as a legal divorce and *χωρίζω* as departure or separation only: Paul would forbid divorce but would allow separation. But analysis doesn't support this difference. *χωρίζω* is found 7 times in Paul's writings, but only here in chap 7 is it referring to departure from marriage (in Rom 8:35-39 it designates separation from Christ love and in Phlm 1:15 to separation from Onesimus). Similarly, *ἀφίημι* occurs 5 times in Paul's writings, but only here in chap 7 is it referring to departure from marriage. And both are interchangeable²⁶⁸. A typical example is v. 11: "but if she happened to separate (*χωρίζω*), let her remain unmarried ...and a husband should not dismiss (*ἀφίημι*) [his] wife"; and then v. 13 "she should not dismiss the husband (*ἀφίημι*)". And in v. 15 we have "But if the unbeliever separates (*χωρίζω*), let him separate (*χωρίζω*)". In the latter case, we need to assume a real divorce as the odds are that the unbeliever will sooner or later be engaged in a new marriage. Moreover, *χωρίζω* is well attested as a technical term for divorce in the strict sense²⁶⁹.

What would be a way around these difficulties? Here are some proposals.

- We have noticed above that Paul refers to Jesus saying when facing an issue in the community and needs the support of authority of some sort; this means that Paul is probably not stating here a general principle or rule, but describing a specific incident
- This would be confirmed by the fact that Paul starts by talking about a woman, instead of following his regular approach of man, then woman, when stating a rule; the core of the issue is probably a woman in Corinth, and Paul is describing this incident, not enacting a rule
- This would as well be confirmed by the aorist passive tense of *χωρίζω*, and so would be referring to something that took place in the past and is still pending, which it is the true meaning of an aorist; it seems that a husband has decided to issue a writ of divorce, which Paul considers wrong (v. 11), and so Paul is saying that the wife should not be separated from her husband, i.e. should not allow herself to be separated from him, as it is often the connotation of a passive verb²⁷⁰
- Finally, v. 10-11 should be analyzed for their own sake, without reference to v. 12-13; otherwise, we introduce a bias in our understanding and difficulties become insurmountable.

In order to obtain a complete picture of the situation, let's move to v. 11. But before leaving v. 10, we must say something about what Paul considers the word of the Lord: "A wife should not be separated from a husband". According to the Gospels, Jesus would have said: "Anyone who divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery, and whoever marries a woman divorced from her husband commits adultery" Lk 16:18 || Mt 19:9. In a Jewish milieu, only the man can initiate a divorce, and Jesus teaching was certainly geared to the husband. The very fact here that Paul presents Jesus saying as addressed to the woman means that he has tweaked Jesus saying to fit a specific situation in Corinth²⁷¹.

2. v. 11 Reconciliation instead of new marriage

ἐὰν δὲ καὶ χωρισθῆ, μενέτω ἄγαμος ἢ τῷ ἀνδρὶ καταλλαγήτω, – καὶ ἄνδρα γυναῖκα μὴ ἀφίεναι (but if she happened nevertheless to separate, let her remain unmarried, or be reconciled with [her] husband, - and a husband is not to dismiss [his] wife)

ἐὰν δὲ καὶ χωρισθῆ (but if she happened nevertheless to separate). *ἐὰν* is a conjunction that means "if ever", and refers not to reality, but to something that may eventually happen, and so usually requires a verb in subjunctive tense. *χωρισθῆ* is the aorist passive subjunctive 3rd person singular of *χωρίζω*. Again, with the aorist, we are being faced with a reality that may have been happened in the past. What exactly is this incident? Up to now, Paul has said: this woman should not allow herself to be separated, but if after all she has separated... At minimum Paul was aware that this couple in Corinth was about to divorce, and so he was asking the woman not to allow it. But being in Ephesus where 1 Cor was written, he was not quite sure of the outcome, as he didn't have the latest information. And he needed to look at different possibilities, including that she may have in fact separated. It is hard to know more.

²⁶⁷ Conzelmann, *op. cit.*, p 120, sees no specific meaning in this change of order and writes: "This change has no bearing on principle; it is purely a matter of choice".

²⁶⁸ *Idem.*: "He appears in the first instance to make a correct distinction between the 'separation' of the wife from her husband and the putting away of the wife by the husband. But later he interchanges the verbs: vv 13, 15", and indication of the equality of the sexes.

²⁶⁹ Murphy-O'Connor, *The Divorced Woman in 1 Cor 7:10-11*, in *JournBibLit*, 100 (1981)605.

²⁷⁰ This is the position of Murphy-O'Connor, *art. cit.*, p. 602, who adds: "If it is wrong for a husband to issue a writ of divorce, it must be equally against the divine intention for his wife to accept it; willing acceptance would be cooperation in disobedience to God".

²⁷¹ *Idem.*

But some commentators have tried to fill the blanks. For Senft, Paul is simply answering the question raised by scrupulous people: "Paul répond à des scrupuleux, qui lui ont demandé s'il n'est pas préférable que des mariés se séparent, et il leur cite la parole du Seigneur pour couper court à des tendances malsaines?"²⁷² But when facing the fact that Paul's answer is addressed to a woman, he is totally puzzled:

Pourquoi Paul s'adresse-t-il dans ces versets d'abord, et une fois même (11a) seulement à la femme? Étaient-ce avant tout les femmes que tourmentaient les scrupules? Autre question : la règle de 11a n'est-elle valable que dans le cas d'une séparation voulue par scrupule religieux, ou pour toute séparation, intervenue pour une raison quelconque?²⁷³

Murphy-O'Connor²⁷⁴ proposes an original solution based on 1 Cor 7:1-9, namely that Paul is answering to those advocating abstinence from sexual intercourse (v. 1b), insisting that married couple owes something physical to each other (v. 3-4), and his emphasis on the fact that not all have the gift of celibacy (7b). So, the incident of v. 11 may be related to a case where the two partners did not agree on abstinence from sexual intercourse. More specifically, the wife, deprived of her conjugal rights from a husband moved by ascetic enthusiasm, would persist with her demand and causing distractions for her spouse, and triggering a situation where divorce was becoming an option for both, especially for the woman who would like to remarry with someone else. In this context, Paul's desire is that the misguided husband undergoes a change of heart, so as to resume normal sexual intercourse, and meeting his spouse needs. Therefore, it is imperative that the woman remains unmarried, because only this state allows full reconciliation. Obviously, Murphy-O'Connor's solution is highly hypothetical. But it has the merit of making sense of all the evidence and making a consistent story.

μένετω ἄγαμος (let her remain unmarried). *μένετω* is the present active imperative 3rd singular of μένω (remain, stand fast, stay) and found 15 times in the Pauline corpus. And *ἄγαμος* is a noun formed of the privative "a" used as a prefix and γάμος (wedding celebration), and translated as "unmarried person". In the whole Bible it is found four times, and only here in 1 Cor 7 for the whole New Testament. One can say that in the Bible the unmarried person status does not get lots of interest. But it is different for Paul as we have seen earlier, as it is a state where he would like people to stay. But why would he like the woman to stay unmarried or single?

ἢ τῷ ἀνδρὶ καταλλαγῆτω (or be reconciled with [her] husband). *καταλλαγῆτω* is the aorist passive imperative of *καταλλάσσω* (to exchange coins of equal value, hence reconcile, change or give away, to be atoned for an offense). In the New Testament, only Paul uses this verb, 6 times. In the Old Testament, it is only found in 2 Macc, except for an instance in Jer. What is noteworthy, only 1 Cor 7:11 refers to a human reconciliation, all the other occurrences refer to the reconciliation of humanity with God through Christ (2 Cor 5:18.19.20; Rom 5:10). The verb here, even though it is an imperative, has the the aorist tense, and so designates an action that should have happened. This means that reconciliation should take place before the unmarried state becomes a permanent state.

So why Paul would like the woman to stay unmarried or single? Because his goal is reconciliation of the couple. From the context, it is clear that the issue is coming from the woman, because reconciliation is in her hands. By invoking the Lord's saying, Paul is obviously putting some pressure on her.

But we know that Paul has no interest in a rule or in a law in itself, as can be seen in his letter to Galatians where he blasts people relying on the Law, not faith. So, we can ask the question: why would the Lord's saying on marriage matter so much? We know that Jesus preaching on divorce was in a way revolutionary in the context of Judaism where a wife could be dismissed for any trivial reason²⁷⁵, and reminding his audience of God's plan of having them becoming a single flesh was implicitly proclaiming the equality of male and female. Paul's goal could not have been the same in a Greek world. In the context of 1 Cor 7:1-9 and what will follow, we need to assume that for him, marriage is a profound commitment, to the point that the spouse has ownership partner's body. Going against this, is going against God's creation. So in invoking the Lord's saying, Paul is not invoking a law, but God's plan.

But what if reconciliation is not possible? Paul says: she should remain nonmarried. At the same time, he said earlier: but because of promiscuity (*πορνεία*), let each [man] have the woman for oneself and let each [woman] have their own husband (v. 2). How could we make sense of both statements? Paul is not here to provide us with an answer. We only need to be reminded that Paul is not proposing rules and principles for all time but resolving specific issues as a pastor.

καὶ ἄνδρα γυναῖκα μὴ ἀφιέναι (and a husband is not to dismiss [his] wife). *ἀφιέναι* is the present active infinitive of *ἀφίημι* (leave, dismiss, forgive, give up, hand over to, send away, let go, loose, set free, dissolve, disband, get rid off, leave alone). It is found 5 times in Paul's writings, but only 3 times in 1 Cor 7 it means divorce. This verb is well known in Gospels-Acts-1 Jn where it occurs 143 times and means mainly "to forgive (sin)" (37 times), and never means divorce or separation. It must be noted that the verb is not here in the imperative tense, but in the infinitive tense. So, Paul is not saying "do not divorce", but

²⁷² Senft, *op. cit.*, p. 91. On the other hand, Conzelmann, *op. cit.*, p. 120, after writing on v. 11 that "it refers to an already existing situation", seems afterward to forget it and never tries to guess what it was.

²⁷³ *Ibid.*, p. 92.

²⁷⁴ *Art. cit.*, p. 604.

²⁷⁵ See John P. Meier, *op. cit.*, v. 4, *Jesus teaching on Divorce*, p. 86, who writes: "Where Philo does agree with Josephus (and with the opinion later ascribed by the Mishna to the House of Hillel) is that the husband may divorce his wife for any reason.

rather “he is not to divorce”; it’s not an order, but a path that should be followed. Why is the man only mentioned at the end? As we said, the focus is on the woman, and she has full control on the next step. But now, the mention of the husband who “is not to divorce” is a way to help the wife to make her decision. If our hypothesis is right, he has no intention to remarry. But he should contribute to the reconciliation plan.

3. v. 12 Don’t dismiss an unbelieving wife

Τοῖς δὲ λοιποῖς λέγω ἐγὼ οὐχ ὁ κύριος • εἴ τις ἀδελφὸς γυναῖκα ἔχει ἄπιστον καὶ αὕτη συνευδοκεῖ οἰκεῖν μετ’ αὐτοῦ, μὴ ἀφιέτω αὐτήν (But to the rest I say - I and not the lord; if any brother has an unbelieving wife and she consents to live with him, then he should not dismiss her)

Τοῖς δὲ λοιποῖς λέγω ἐγὼ οὐχ ὁ κύριος (But to the rest I say - I and not the lord). *λοιποῖς* is here an adjective used as a substantive, dative masculine plural of *λοιπός* (the remaining, the rest, at last, finally). It is a multi-purpose word. On the one hand, it may refer to objects like time (“from now on (*λοιπός*), let even those who have wives be as though they had none”, 1 Cor 7:29), or it may refer to reality that have many instances, for example plant (“but a bare seed, perhaps of wheat or of some of the *other* (*λοιπός*) [plants]”, 1 Cor 15:37), churches (“How have you been worse off than the *other* (*λοιπός*) churches”, 2 Cor 12:13), and people like Jews (“And the *other* (*λοιπός*) Jews joined him in this hypocrisy”, Gal 2:13). It occurs 26 times in the Pauline corpus. Who are the people referred to by Paul as the others or the rest? In v. 10 he started saying “to married people” and then went on talking on a specific case where a woman wanted to divorce her husband. From Paul’s words, we need to assume that both spouses were Christians, as he gives prescriptions to both (she should reconcile... husband should not dismiss [his] wife). Here, in v. 12, we need to assume that he wants to talk about other (*λοιπός*) cases of married people. As he just talked about married spouses, we are not surprised that he should address now the case of mixed marriage, where one of the spouses is not a believer²⁷⁶.

Hurd²⁷⁷ notes that in v. 8.10.12 we have a series of 3 datives:

- v. 8 To the unmarried and widow I say...
- v. 10 To the married I give charge
- v. 12 To the rest I say...

For him, this reflects different answers to questions coming from the Corinthians’ letter. If we add the questions from the beginning, we obtain the following list of questions:

- In the case of married people, ought sexual relations to be abandoned
- In the case of those who are not married, ought they to aim at the celibate life and not marry at all?
- Can we divorce?
- What about a marriage in which one partner is converted to Christianity while the other remains heathen?²⁷⁸

For sure, Paul doesn’t talk on anything if it isn’t an issue. But would Corinthians have gone so far as to promote divorce, as some scholars are proposing?²⁷⁹ If this makes sense, it is nevertheless hard to find all the evidence. So, Hurd’s position on the content of Corinthian’s letter seems safer. This is how he reconstructs the letter:

Concerning problems of sex and marriage: we believe that Christian couples should forego marital intercourse so that they may devote themselves more fully to things spiritual. After all, is it not true that it is well for a man not to touch a woman? For this reason, we also think it best that the unmarried and the widows among us remain unmarried, an attitude of which you must approve since you yourself remain unmarried.

It sometimes occurs that the harmony of a marriage is threatened by the demands of the spiritual life. On the one hand, some of the brothers are unable to refrain completely from their wives; on the other hand, some of the marriages include one partner who is not a believer. In these cases, we recommend separation so that the spiritual life of the more devout partner is not hampered²⁸⁰.

This is an interesting effort to recreate the Corinthians letter, even though Hurd missed the point of v. 10-11 where the focus is not the man who is unable to restrict from sexual life, but the woman.

But there is another point brought by Hurd that is worthwhile mentioning.

We noted in discussing immoral men that the Corinthian Reply gave evidence of a special interest in the unbeliever, and that probably Paul had made a strong statement in the Previous Letter contact with unbelievers. Now it is possible to revise our understanding of the Corinthians’ statement concerning divorce and to suggest that it too was

²⁷⁶ Conzelmann, *op. cit.*, p. 121, writes: “The rest’ is not intended in an exhaustive sense, but as emerge only later, it means those Christians who are living in a Christians/pagans mixed marriage”. This comment is a bit surprising: besides Christian marriage and mixed marriage, what another category would be possible? Homosexual marriage? This would never come to mind to Paul.

²⁷⁷ *Op. cit.*, p. 165.

²⁷⁸ See Hurd, *ibid.*, p. 157.

²⁷⁹ *ibid.*, p. 167: “Certainly divorce could be justified by their slogan as quoted by Paul, and a number of scholars have suggested that Corinthians had carried their hostility to marriage to the point of advocating divorce.”

²⁸⁰ *ibid.*, p. 168.

an objection – an objection to Paul’s prohibition of association with unbelievers. To Paul the Corinthians had protested, what of those *married* to unbelievers? Do you mean that they should be divorced?”²⁸¹

The merit of Hurd’s comment is to point out the impact of this previous letter, this lost letter, where Paul would have said: “I wrote to you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral persons” (1 Cor 5:9). It is easy to understand how this previous letter brought confusion, especially for those married with a pagan partner²⁸².

So it is now time for Paul to clarify the whole thing. But we cannot avoid being stricken by the way Paul introduces his view: “I say - I and not the Lord” (*λέγω ἐγὼ οὐχ ὁ κύριος*). Why is he being so specific? By stressing the fact that the guideline is coming from him, not the Lord, does he mean that it is only an opinion and not mandatory? This question can be answered in two steps.

- i. *οὐχ ὁ κύριος* (not the Lord). From the Gospels, we know that the historical Jesus forbade divorce and would have something like: “But I say to you that any man who divorces his wife, causes her to commit adultery; and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery”²⁸³. As Paul is about to talk about an exception, obviously it cannot come from the Lord. More specifically, Jesus didn’t have to address the case of mixed marriage, as his focus was on the Jewish community. So, to be honest, he cannot invoke the authority of the Lord. This means that what Paul is about to say, does not have less authority because it doesn’t come from the Lord, but it covers a topic not addressed by the Lord.
- ii. *λέγω* (I say), the verb is the first-person singular, occurs 41 times in the Pauline corpus. As Paul is writing letters, it is expected that he will say “I”. Sometimes he wants to make a hard statement: “I say this to your shame” (1 Cor 6:5); sometimes he wants to qualify a prescription: “This I say by way of concession, not of command” (1 Cor 7:6); sometimes he is giving an advice that he expects to be followed: “I say this for your own benefit, not to put any restraint upon you” (1 Cor 7:35); sometimes he is exhorting his audience: “Live by the Spirit, I say, and do not gratify the desires of the flesh” (Gal 5:16); sometimes he wants to stress the fact that he is saying the truth: “I say the truth in Christ — I am not lying; my conscience confirms it by the Holy Spirit” (Rom 9:1); or sometimes, he is putting emphasis on his status: “To you Gentiles I am speaking now. Inasmuch then as I am an apostle to the Gentiles, I glorify my ministry...” (Rom 11:13). And we could go on and on. In all occurrences of *λέγω*, there is some kind of self-assertiveness related to his sense of being an apostle and a pastor responsible for a community.

In Gal 5:2 we find the same combination of *ἐγὼ* and *λέγω*: “Listen! I (*ἐγὼ*), Paul, am telling (*λέγω*) you that if you let yourselves be circumcised, Christ will be of no benefit to you”. This is a really strong statement. It is not a matter of opinion, but of a solemn proclamation.

Finally, we have a confirmation that Paul is considering his statements as something coming from God, even though they are not found among the Lord’s sayings: “Now concerning virgins, I have no command of the Lord, but I give my view as one who by the Lord’s mercy is trustworthy” (1 Cor 7:25).

In a nutshell, Paul considers that what he is about to say should be followed as much as if coming from the Lord.

εἴ τις ἀδελφὸς γυναῖκα ἔχει ἄπιστον (if any brother has an unbelieving wife). *εἴ τις* (if any) is very frequent in the Pauline corpus (43 times). It is not surprising in the context of letters sent by a pastor to the community: he needs to look at different situations, different scenarios. As there are no rule that fits all, then he needs to consider each situation for its own sake (If this, then).

ἀδελφός is the masculine nominative singular of *ἀδελφός* (brother, kinsman, colleague, associate). It occurs 132 times in the Pauline corpus. Since his very first letter addressed to the whole Church, Paul speaks to the “brothers”, i.e. all the Christians in the community. Obviously, he never explained where this name came from. But we know this is a universal behaviour to call “brother” not only someone who has the same parents, but anyone with whom one share something important that creates a relationship, national identity, religion, faith, etc. This behaviour is found in the Old Testament, and we should not be surprised that it pursues its course in the Christian community²⁸⁴. In the Pauline corpus, on top of its plural form, we find the singular form in two different circumstances: specific people are called “brother” (Sosthenes, 1 Cor 1:1; Apollos, 1 Cor 16:12; Timothy, 2 Cor 1:1; Titus, 2 Cor 2:13; Luke? 2 Cor 8:18; Epaphroditus, Phil 2:25; Quartus, Rom 16:23; Tychicus, Col 4:7; Onesimus, Col 4:9; Philemon, Phlm 1:1); but also the singular form is used to pinpoint a category of individuals representing a specific situation (the sexually immoral, 1 Cor 5:11; one going to court, 1 Cor 6:6; one representing the Christian party in a mixed marriage, 1 Cor 7:12.14-15; the fragile Christian in context of meat offered to idols, 1 Cor 8:11-13 and Rom 14:10-21; someone who can be exploited in the community, 1 Thess 4:6; one living in idleness, 2 Thess 3:6; one who does not obey to

²⁸¹ Hurd, *op. cit.*, p. 224.

²⁸² According to Senft, *op. cit.*, p. 92, some married Christians believed that were contaminated by the pagan partner: “Il (Paul) doit résoudre deux questions connexes. La première, dictée par le scrupule religieux et la crainte d’une contamination par le paganisme du conjoint”.

²⁸³ According to J. P. Meier, Mt 5:32 may represent the oldest form of Jesus saying. In *op. cit.*, p. 124, he writes: “The most important single conclusion of our investigation is that the criteria of multiple attestation, of discontinuity and embarrassment, and of coherence all argue for the historicity of Jesus’ prohibition of divorce”.

²⁸⁴ If the plural form usually refers to the Christians in the community, there are sometimes exceptions, like 1 Cor 9:5 where it refers to real blood brothers of Jesus.

Paul's letters, 2 Thess 3:15). So why is Paul using the word *ἀδελφός* here in 1 Cor 7:12? He could have written: *εἴ τις ἀνὴρ* (if any man/husband) as he did all along 1 Cor 7? But this wording may have brought confusion, as Paul is then talking of the spouse in term of "unbeliever"; one would have to "guess" that *ἀνὴρ* is the Christian party. But why didn't he write: "*εἴ τις Χριστιανός*" (if any Christian)? The answer is simple: *χριστιανός* is not really part of the New Testament vocabulary, and Paul does not seem to know it²⁸⁵.

γυναῖκα ἔχει ἀπίστον (has an unbelieving wife). *ἀπίστον* is the feminine accusative singular of the adjective *ἀπιστος* (without faith or trust, incredible, unbelieving, incredulous, suspicious, disobedient, disloyal). It mainly belongs to Pauline corpus vocabulary where it is found 14 times, and mainly in 1 Cor (9 times) and 2 Cor (3 times)²⁸⁶. So it seems a typical Corinthian situation. When we look at both Corinthian letters, *ἀπιστος* is used in three different situations

- i. In 1 Cor 7:13-15, it refers to the unbelieving party, and the connotation is neither negative or positive, it is neutral; it is only a matter of fact, a marriage with a pagan spouse.
- ii. In 1 Cor 14:22-24, it refers to those outside the community who happen to be invited while the community is gathered, and some are talking in tongues and others are prophesying. Obviously, they are not the same unbelievers as those in partnership with Christians through marriage. Paul calls them *ἰδιώτης* (illiterate with respect to Christian faith). As they are totally not cognizant of Christian faith, they are the ones who provide the criteria determining what is worthwhile, i.e. talking in tongues or prophesying. As they may become believers through revelation of what is in their heart by prophecy, then the latter is better for them. For Paul, bringing unbelievers to the Christian is his main goal.
- iii. In 2 Cor 6:14-15, it refers to people whose lifestyle is incompatible with Christian lifestyle: "Do not be mismatched with unbelievers". Then Paul goes on by tagging them with "lawlessness", "darkness", "Beliar", and "idols". And previously, he seems to have inferred that they rejected on purpose the Gospel: "In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ" (2 Cor 4:4). Paul identifies them with the "world" that has been presented as the adversary of the Gospel.

In this context, 1 Cor 7:12 talks of *ἀπιστος* in a very open fashion without any judgmental comment.

καὶ αὕτη συνευδοκεῖ οἰκεῖν μετ' αὐτοῦ (and she consents to live with him). *συνευδοκεῖ* is the present active indicative 3rd singular of *συνευδοκέω* (to be pleased together with, to approve together, to consent or agree to, to concur with, to join in approving). This verb is formed of the preposition *σύν* (together with), the adverb *εὖ* (well) and the verb *δοκέω* (to think, suppose, imagine). It is barely found in the New Testament: only Luke and Paul use it. In Acts, it describes Paul "approving" Stephen's blood being shed (Act 8:1; 22:20), in Lk 11:48 Jesus is accusing the Pharisees of "approving" the killing the prophets performed by their ancestors. In Paul's letters, it occurs three times, in Rom 1:32 (after describing all the wicked deeds of pagans, he writes: "they not only practicing them but even approving those practicing them") and in 1 Cor 7:12-13. It is a bit ironic that, besides 1 Cor 7, all the other occurrences of *συνευδοκέω* in the New Testament are related to approving an evil thing. But we cannot assume that, in Paul's mind, the relationship with a pagan partner through marriage is an evil thing, based on what follows. However, the very fact that an explicit decision needs to be made implies some obstacles: maybe different lifestyle, moral requirements, duties related to the cult, education of children. Somehow, we can assume that concessions will be required.

οἰκεῖν is the present active infinitive of *οἰκέω* (to dwell in, inhabit, colonize, settle in). In the New Testament, it is only found in the Pauline corpus (9 times). But what is noteworthy, it always refers to a spiritual reality, except here in 1 Cor 7: "God's Spirit dwells in you" (1 Cor 3:16; see as well Rom 8:9.11); "sin dwells within me" (Rom 7:17; see as well Rom 7:18.20); "Christ dwells in unapproachable light" (1 Tim 6:16). If we look at *ἐνοικέω* (to dwell in, inhabit), a synonymous verb, only found in Paul's letters (5 times), it refers exclusively to a spiritual reality: "I (living God) will dwell in them" (2 Cor 6:16); "his Spirit that dwells in you" (Rom 8:11; see 2 Tim 1:14); "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly" (Col 3:16); "a faith that dwelt first in your grandmother" (2 Tim:1:5). What to conclude? 1 Cor 7:12-13 is the only place in the Pauline letters where *οἰκεῖν* refers to a physical dwelling, and so we can ask: is it really part of Paul's vocabulary? In other circumstances, Paul would use the verb *ἐπιμένω* (to stay at or with, to abide, to continue, to remain) to express this idea of staying with someone or somewhere: "I did go up to Jerusalem to visit Cephas and stayed with him fifteen days" (Gal 1:18); "I do not want to see you now just in passing, for I hope to stay with you, if the Lord permits. But I will stay in Ephesus until Pentecost" (1 Cor 16:7-8). So why is he using *οἰκεῖν* in 1 Cor 7? Either this verb is borrowed from the Corinthians letter, or for Paul living together has the strong meaning of becoming a single entity, like the Spirit living in us. Both are possible. On the one hand, the Corinthians would have written to Paul: "We know that you asked in your previous letter not to associate with sexually immoral person, nevertheless would you agree that a brother or a sister could continue to dwell with an unbelieving partner?" On the other hand, Paul has expressed earlier his vision of sexual intimacy: "The two shall be one flesh" (1 Cor 6:16, quoting Gen 2:24); becoming one body means becoming one person, hence his concerns about mixed marriage. There is no way to decide.

μὴ ἀφίετω αὐτήν (he should not dismiss her). *ἀφίετω* is the present active imperative 3rd singular of *ἀφήμι*. In v. 11, Paul used *ἀφήμι* in the infinitive tense (not to dismiss). Here he uses the imperative, which looks a bit stronger. But what is worth

²⁸⁵ This word is only found in Acts 11:26; 26:28; 1 Pet 4:16.

²⁸⁶ Elsewhere it is only found in Mk 9:19 (Unbelieving generation) || Mt 17:17 || Lk 9:41, in Lk 12:46 (portion given to the unfaithful), in Jn 20:27 (Don't be unbelieving), and in Rv 21:8 (unbelievers will end up in the lake of fire).

noting is that the imperative is addressed to the believing party, to the man here, to the woman in v. 13: Paul has not authority on the unbelieving partner.

So, what exactly is Paul stating? A mixed marriage should continue, i.e. there should not be divorce, provided that the unbelieving party agrees. According to Conzelmann, Paul is answering here two questions.

- i. May Christian and pagan live together in marriage at all.
- ii. What rule in view of prohibition of divorce is to be recognized by the Christian partner when the pagan partner secures a divorce? Does the marriage still continue to be valid for him?²⁸⁷

So, for Paul, Christian and pagan may live together, and the only requirement is the free consent of the pagan partner. There is no demand for conversion of the pagan. We can assume that the believing partner will be able to live freely his faith.

4. v. 13 Don't dismiss an unbelieving husband

καὶ γυναῖχ ἣτις ἔχει ἄνδρα ἄπιστον καὶ οὗτος συνευδοκεῖ οἰκεῖν μετ' αὐτῆς, μὴ ἀφιέτω τὸν ἄνδρα (And wife who has unbelieving husband and he consents to live with her, then she should not dismiss the husband)

v. 13 contains the exact same words as v. 12 (except *εἴ τις* of v. 12 has been changed to *ἣτις* in v. 13, based on the reconstruction of the authentic reading²⁸⁸), but it is now the Christian woman who can initiate the divorce, and it is the pagan man who needs to consent to dwell with her. Obviously, this belongs to a Greco-Roman environment where both men and women can initiate a divorce²⁸⁹.

5. v. 14 Marriage promotes sanctification

ἡγίασται γὰρ ὁ ἀνὴρ ὁ ἄπιστος ἐν τῇ γυναικὶ καὶ ἡγίασται ἡ γυναῖχ ἡ ἄπιστος ἐν τῷ ἀδελφῷ• ἐπεὶ ἄρα τὰ τέκνα ὑμῶν ἀκάθαρτά ἐστιν, νῦν δὲ ἅγια ἐστίν (For the unbelieving husband has been made holy through the wife and the unbelieving wife has been made holy through the brother. Otherwise indeed your children would be unclean, but now [in fact] they are holy)

ἡγίασται γὰρ ὁ ἀνὴρ ὁ ἄπιστος ἐν τῇ γυναικὶ (For the unbelieving husband has been made holy through the wife). *ἡγίασται* is the perfect passive indicative 3rd person singular of *ἀγιάζω* (to acknowledge or render venerable, to separate from profane and dedicate to God, to cleanse externally, to purify, to consecrate, to sanctify, to hallow, to become holy). It occurs 7 times in the Pauline corpus, and as we have noted earlier²⁹⁰, it needs to be analyzed in conjunction with the adjective *ἅγιος* (saint) and the substantive *ἁγιασμός* (sanctification). As a starter, we need to look back at Paul's Jewish background²⁹¹. In Israel, even if the beginning and in a high number of books, holiness applies to objects related to the sanctuary and the cult, and so were sacred or dedicated to God, it did expand to all reality in relationship with Yahweh. In this regard, Deuteronomy played a major role: "For you are a people holy to the Lord your God; it is you the Lord has chosen out of all the peoples on earth to be his people, his treasured possession" (Deut 14:2). So holiness is not a personal achievement, but the very fact of having been "separated" for the other through a free election by God. At the same time, there are conditions to stay in this relationship or alliance: "The Lord will establish you as his holy people, as he has sworn to you, if you keep the commandments of the Lord your God and walk in his ways" (Deut 28:9). This can be summarized in the Leviticus formula: "You shall be holy, for I the Lord your God am holy" (19:2).

This Jewish background explains a lot of Paul's usage of holiness. A typical example is showed by the beginning of 1 Corinthians:

To the church of God that is in Corinth, to those who have been sanctified (*ἀγιάζω*) in Christ Jesus, called to be saints (*ἅγιος*), together with all those who in every place call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, both their Lord and ours (1:2)

We have almost a replicate of Deuteronomy's view on Israel, except now the Church is the new people who has been elected (called) by God through Christ²⁹². Because of this election, the people is separated, i.e. sanctified (here *ἀγιάζω* is in the perfect tense, so in the past). So, holiness is not an inner quality, it is the default status due the very fact of being a believer and belonging to the community of believers. Nevertheless, there is something different from Deuteronomy in Paul. If the Jewish people were holy by the very fact of being Jewish, for Paul the entry door for holiness is no longer Jewish blood, but faith:

But we must always give thanks to God for you, brothers and sisters beloved by the Lord, because God chose you as the first fruits for salvation through sanctification (*ἁγιασμός*) by the Spirit and through faith (*πίστις*) in the truth (2 Thess 2:13)

So, the saints are a community of faithful people from all nations.

²⁸⁷ Op. cit., p. 121.

²⁸⁸ See our textual critique of v. 13a earlier.

²⁸⁹ On the different stances on divorce in a Greco-Roman culture and in a Jewish culture, see John P. Meier, op. cit., v. 4, p. 74-128. Quoting R. Leonhard, Conzelmann, op. cit., p. 121, note 22, writes: "Divorces in Rome depended in principle on the free choice of the marriage partners and were rendered difficult only by the fact they were partly bound up with certain forms and partly subject to penalties".

²⁹⁰ See our excursus on Paul and marriage.

²⁹¹ On this, see Jean L'Hour, *Qadash*, and Jean-Yves Thériault, *Hagiasmos*, in Nouveau vocabulaire biblique, p. 165-170, and p. 386-390.

²⁹² But Christ's action is mediated by the Holy Spirit: "God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us" (Rom 5:5)

But, at the same time, there is an unfinished job.

May the God of peace himself sanctify (*ἀγιάζω*, aorist active optative) you entirely (*ὀλοτελής*); and may your spirit and soul and body be kept sound and blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ (1 Thess 5:23)

By wishing Thessalonians to be sanctified entirely (*ὀλοτελής*), Paul expresses the idea that some work need to be done until the coming back of Christ. It is like Deuteronomy who asks the holy people to “keep the commandments of the Lord your God and walk in his ways”. This idea is explained through the substantive *ἀγιασμός* in Romans:

But now that you have been freed from sin and enslaved to God, you have the fruit belonging to you towards (*εἰς*) sanctification (*ἀγιασμός*). The end is eternal life. (6:22)

So sanctification is a given as well as a goal (*εἰς*), the end result is eternal life (see also Rom 6:19 where Paul writes: “so now present your members as slaves to righteousness for (*εἰς*) sanctification (*ἀγιασμός*)”).

What is the opposite of sanctification? Or, said differently, what prevents sanctification? In 1 Thess 4:3, Paul writes: “For this is the will of God, your sanctification (*ἀγιασμός*): that you abstain from fornication (*πορνεία*)”. We can guess that the obstacle to holiness is not only fornication, but Paul tends to highlight it, especially in Corinth and Thessalonica where it seems a real problem. Under Paul’s pen, the opposite of sanctification is often summarized under the adjective *ἀκάθαρτος* (unclean, uncleansed, and impure) or the substantive *ἀκαθαρσία* (uncleanness, depravity, impurity). This is exactly what we find in 1 Thess 4:7 “For God did not call us to impurity (*ἀκαθαρσία*) but in holiness (*ἀγιασμός*)”. When we try to dig to find out more details on this “impurity”, a few different answers come up. On the one hand, there is a generic answer where it covers everything related to disorder: “For just as you once presented your members as slaves to impurity (*ἀκαθαρσία*) and to greater and greater lawlessness, so now present your members as slaves to righteousness for sanctification (*ἀγιασμός*)” (Rom 6:19). Lawlessness (*ἀνομία*, without law), refers to all kind for disorders. On the other hand, most of the time, *ἀκαθαρσία* is tied to moral disorder, of which sexual disorder is prominent: “Put to death, therefore, whatever in you is earthly: fornication (*πορνεία*), impurity (*ἀκαθαρσία*), passion, evil desire, and greed (which is idolatry)” (Col 3:5). In Gal 5:19-20, we have a longer list: “Now the works of the flesh are obvious: fornication (*πορνεία*), impurity (*ἀκαθαρσία*), licentiousness (*ἀσέλγεια*), idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, anger, quarrels, dissensions, factions, envy, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these”. Here, impurity is inserted between *πορνεία* and *ἀσέλγεια* (unbridled lust, excess, licentiousness, lasciviousness). It is difficult to avoid a sexual connotation to impurity.

After this analysis of “make holy”, how to interpret: “For the unbelieving husband has been made holy through the wife”? Upfront Conzelmann warns us: “Its interpretation is very difficult. To what extent is the pagan partner ‘sanctified in’ the Christian partner? To what extent are the children holy? What is the relation between v. 14a and 14b?”²⁹³. Then, he goes on writing:

It looks as if holiness is crassly regarded as a thing; it is transferable, without faith (and even baptism) being necessary. There can in fact be no denying the massively thing like character of the idea²⁹⁴.

If we understand Conzelmann correctly, by simply being in contact with the Christian party in the same household, the unbeliever inherits the same positive electrical charge that repels the negative electrical charge of the world. According to Paul Jewish upbringing, the world is desacralized, and so no longer has any power on the believer. This is why:

Through the believing partner, the marriage between a pagan and a Christian is withdrawn from the control of the powers of the world. In living together with the world, the “saints” are the stronger party. The decisive idea lies not in an ontological definition of the state of the non-Christian members of the family, but in the assertion that no alien power plays any part in the Christian’s dealings with them²⁹⁵.

In a nutshell, through the Christian party, the whole household is subtracted from the power of the world.

Senft agrees with Conzelmann and writes: “La sainteté du croyant se communique au non-croyant physiquement, par contact extérieur comme à une chose”²⁹⁶. This approach would stem from Leviticus ritualism. And so he comes to a similar conclusion as Conzelmann:

Dans l’union mixte deux sphères de puissance se font face, celle du Christ et celle du monde païen, mais celle du Christ prévaut, car le Christ est maître des puissances Ainsi le partenaire païen est inclus nolens volens dans la sphère de puissance du Christ et celui qui appartient au Christ n’a rien à redouter.²⁹⁷

Based on our analysis so far, we can start with two statements. Among the three meaning of “unbeliever” we have identified, here *ἄπιστος* refers to the first one which is neutral, i.e. has no negative connotation; obviously, it is far away from the third meaning about whom Paul says: “Do not be mismatched with unbelievers” (2 Cor 6:14-15). As well, we have identified two major meaning of “holiness”, the first one being the default status due the very fact of being a believer and belonging to the community of believers, the second meaning being an ongoing growth by letting the Holy Spirit giving direction to one’s life. When talking of the holiness of the unbeliever, he is referring obviously to the first meaning. We have pinpointed the Jewish background of this notion where someone, by the very fact of being part of the Jewish people, belongs of the elected nation, and so under God’s protection and influence. Based on Paul’s view on marital union where two bodies become a single entity,

²⁹³ *Op. cit.*, p. 121.

²⁹⁴ *Idem.*

²⁹⁵ *Ibidem.*, p. 122.

²⁹⁶ *Op. cit.*, p. 93.

²⁹⁷ *Idem.*

the latter belongs to the Church of saints as a Jewish belongs to the elected nation by default, without the need of expressing faith or being baptized.

But there is more. By the very fact of being in a household where lives a Christian, Paul probably assumes that the unbeliever will be presented with a vision of life and a lifestyle that is the opposite of what is predominant in the world, and so cut of its influence. We have seen that what prevents holiness from growing is fornication, impurity, disorder, lust, and greed. But we can assume that the unbeliever is kept away from this moral wickedness through the believing partner. For the Christian and Christian community create an environment that resists the power of the world, and keeps it at bay. On this Murphy-O'Connor writes:

Just as those living in polluted environments have no alternative but to breathe in toxins, so those born into the world are automatically infected by its attitudes and standards, its root principles. They can no more offer opposition than wood chips tossed into a fast-flowing river. Paul deliberately evokes enslavement in order to underline that no resistance is possible. The echoes of his own experience, both religious and secular, are unmistakable. Freedom becomes a reality only 'in Christ', namely, in and through the Christian community.²⁹⁸

In a nutshell, holiness is not an ontological state of an individual, but an environment where real freedom can grow. So Paul's statement: "For the unbelieving husband has been made holy through the wife", can be rephrased in the following way: For the unbelieving husband, through marital union with his Christian wife, belongs to an environment free of the toxic forces of the world, where he can grow.

καὶ ἡγιασται ἡ γυνὴ ἡ ἄπιστος ἐν τῷ ἀδελφῷ (and the unbelieving wife has been made holy through the brother). This statement is parallel to the beginning of the verse:

14a ἡγιασται	ὁ ἀνὴρ ὁ ἄπιστος	ἐν τῇ γυναικί
14b ἡγιασται	ἡ γυνὴ ἡ ἄπιστος	ἐν τῷ ἀδελφῷ

But one thing prevents a strict parallel: Paul should have used *ἐν τῇ ἀδελφῇ* (through the sister) in 14a, instead of *ἐν τῇ γυναικί* (through the wife), to match *ἐν τῷ ἀδελφῷ* (through the brother) in 14b. This is why the Western text type has *ἐν τῇ γυναικί τῇ πιστῇ* (the believing wife) in 14a, and some Byzantine and Alexandrian text type manuscripts have *ἐν τῷ ἀνδρὶ* (the husband) in 14b, trying to restore the strict parallel²⁹⁹. We must admit this is probably an oversight from Paul, as at the next verse he will use *ἀδελφῆ*. At the same time, it is a fact that, while *ἀδελφός* is used 132 times in the Pauline corpus, *ἀδελφῆ* is used only 6 times, and in the sense of Christian woman, only 5 times, of which 3 times to qualify a woman with a specific name in his greetings (Rom 16:1.15; Phlm 1:2). It is possible that men outnumbered women in the Christian community³⁰⁰. If this is the case, it highlights Paul's effort to keep men and women on the same level when giving guidelines.

ἐπεὶ ἄρα τὰ τέκνα ὑμῶν ἀκάθαρτά ἐστιν, νῦν δὲ ἅγια ἐστιν (Otherwise indeed your children would be unclean, but now [in fact] they are holy). *ἐπεὶ* is a conjunction formed of *ἐπί* (upon, over) and *εἰ* (if) that has either a temporal meaning (after that, since, when) or a causal meaning (otherwise). In the Pauline corpus, it occurs 10 times. Most of the time, it has a causal meaning.

- 1 Cor 5:10 "not at all meaning the immoral of this world, or the greedy and robbers, or idolaters, otherwise you would then need to go out of the world"
- 1 Cor 14:16 "Otherwise, if you say a blessing with the spirit, how can anyone in the position of an outsider say the "Amen" to your thanksgiving"
- 1 Cor 15:29 "Otherwise, what will those people do who receive baptism on behalf of the dead? If the dead are not raised at all, why are people baptized on their behalf?"
- Rom 3:6 "By no means! Otherwise, how could God judge the world?"
- Rom 11:6 "But if it is by grace, it is no longer on the basis of works, otherwise grace would no longer be grace"
- Rom 11:22 "Note then the kindness and the severity of God: severity toward those who have fallen, but God's kindness toward you, provided you continue in his kindness; otherwise, you also will be cut off."

So the conjunction *ἐπεὶ* (otherwise) introduces a clause that stresses the absurdity of not accepting the previous statement. Moreover, Paul adds the particle *ἄρα* (and so, so then, accordingly, therefore, indeed), found 27 times in the Pauline corpus, that put more emphasis of the consequence of rejecting the previous statement. The only other case where Paul uses *ἐπεὶ* and *ἄρα* in the same sentence is 1 Cor 5: 9-10, when referring to the previous letter: "I wrote to you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral person - not at all meaning the immoral of this world, or the greedy and robbers, or idolaters, otherwise (*ἐπεὶ*) you would then (*ἄρα*) need to go out of the world". To go out of the world is impossible, and so is an absurd statement. Similarly, in v. 14c saying that "children would be unclean" is absurd and impossible.

²⁹⁸ Murphy-O'Connor, *Paul. A Critical Life*, p. 208.

²⁹⁹ See our section on Textual Critique.

³⁰⁰ But Luke in Acts gives us a different view when presenting woman as first to be converted, for instance in Philippi with the businesswoman Lydia (Act 16:14).

What exactly are unclean (*ἀκάθαρτος*) children? Unfortunately, there have only three occurrences of *ἀκάθαρτος* in the Pauline corpus, and if we restrict ourselves to the authentic letters³⁰¹, we end up with only our v. 14 and 2 Cor 6:17 where Paul seems to quote a few texts of the Old Testament: “Therefore come out from them, and be separate from them, says the Lord, and touch nothing unclean; then I will welcome you”. A portion of the latter seems a quote of Is 52:11 LXX “Depart, Depart, come out from there and touch not the unclean (*ἀκάθαρτος*). Come out from the midst of her. Be set apart, you bearing the vessels of the Lord”. The context of Isaiah is God redeeming Jerusalem, bringing his salvation and setting his people apart from the nations. And the context of 2 Cor 6: 17 is the following:

14 Do not be mismatched with unbelievers. For what partnership is there between righteousness and lawlessness?

Or what fellowship is there between light and darkness? 15 What agreement does Christ have with Beliar? Or what does a believer share with an unbeliever? 16 What agreement has the temple of God with idols? (2 Cor 6:14-16)

From both Isaiah and 2 Cor, the context is clear: *ἀκάθαρτος* refers to unbelievers, people from the nations or the world, people that belong to darkness and Beliar. This is confirmed by reference to the opposite in v. 14c, i.e. *ἅγιος*. We have seen earlier that the adjective *ἅγιος* refers more than 50% of the time to the members of the Christian community. There is no doubt here that unclean children mean children not belonging the Christian community, not sharing this environment that protect them from a polluted world.

Another question has been raised by scholars: whose children are we talking about?³⁰²

- i. Children of mixed marriage
- ii. Children born of Christian marriages
- iii. Both

To answer this question, we should first look at the word *τέκνον* (a little child, child, a young animal). It occurs 39 times in the Pauline corpus. But it provides no real insight, as its usage can be split in two categories: child in relationship to parents (16 times, for instance 2 Cor 12:14 “for children ought not to lay up for their parents, but parents for their children”, or Col 3:20 “Children, obey your parents in everything, for this is your acceptable duty in the Lord”), and child as a symbol of a relationship to a master (23 times, for instance 1 Cor 4:14 “I am not writing this to make you ashamed, but to admonish you as my beloved children”, or Phil 2:15 “so that you may be blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation”, or 1 Cor 4:17 “For this reason I sent you Timothy, who is my beloved and faithful child in the Lord”). As there is no mention of baptism, we need to assume that these little children were not baptized. Moreover, if they were baptized, their case would be useless to support Paul’s argument³⁰³.

Paul says, “**you** children” (*τέκνα ὑμῶν*). Whom is he talking to? The whole community as it usually the case all through 1 Corinthians, or to mixed couples? If we look at what follows, i.e. v. 15 (God has called **you** (*ὑμεῖς*) in peace) where Paul presents the principle of his solution, it makes total sense that he is talking to mixed couples in order to provide guidelines, and so “you” needs to refer to them. And since v. 12, Paul has been addressing the special case of mixed couples: so his audience has to be these mixed couples, and not Christian couples who are not really involved in this situation³⁰⁴.

We conclude that the children referred to by Paul are children born of mixed marriage³⁰⁵.

νῦν δὲ ἅγια ἐστίν (but now [in fact] they are holy). *νῦν* (now) plays here an interesting role. This adverb occurs 51 times in the Pauline corpus. Usually, it means a point in time (40 times), more specifically “today”, or “at the present time”, and is translated by “now”; for instance, 1 Cor 3:2 “I fed you with milk, not solid food, for you were not ready for solid food. Even now (*νῦν*) you are still not ready”. There are few cases (7 times), where still keeping its reference to the present time, it looks forward to the future, establishing a before and an after, and means: from now on, henceforth; for instance, 2 Cor 5:16 “From now on (*νῦν*), therefore, we regard no one from a human point of view; even though we once knew Christ from a human point of view, now (*νῦν*) we know him no longer in that way”. But there are four occurrences, all in 1 Corinthians, where *νῦν* is used as a transition for a new argument, an argument that often disconfirm what precedes, and could be translated “the fact is”:

- 1 Cor 5:10-11 “I did not mean the immoral of this world, or the greedy and robbers, or idolaters, since you would then need to go out of the world. But the fact is (*νῦν*) I am writing to you not to associate with anyone who bears the name of brother or sister who is sexually immoral or greedy, or is an idolater, reviler, drunkard, or robber”
- 1 Cor 7:14 “Otherwise indeed your children would be unclean, but now [in fact] (*νῦν*) they are holy”
- 1 Cor 12:19-20 “If all were a single member, where would the body be? But the fact is (*νῦν*), there are many members, yet one body”

³⁰¹ And so removing Ephesians, as most scholars don’t consider it from Paul’s hand.

³⁰² See Conzelmann, *op. cit.*, p. 123 and Senft, *op. cit.*, p. 93.

³⁰³ Or as Conzelmann, *op. cit.*, p. 123, note 41, puts it: “When thus interpreted as referring to baptized children, the whole problem becomes unintelligible”.

³⁰⁴ Senft, *op. cit.*, p. 93, holds the opposite view: “Passant à la deuxième personne – *vos enfants* – l’apôtre s’adresse à l’ensemble de la communauté pour la prendre à témoin : Aucun couple chrétien ne songe à considérer ses enfants comme impurs, sous prétexte qu’ils ne sont pas au même titre que leurs parents des membres de l’Église! Ils sont « sanctifiés » par leurs parents croyants. Il en est de même du conjoint païen d’un croyant”.

³⁰⁵ This is as well the conclusion of Conzelman, *ibid.*

- 1 Cor 14: 6 “(I would like all of you to speak in tongues...) But the fact is (νῦν), brothers and sisters, if I come to you speaking in tongues, how will I benefit you unless I speak to you in some revelation or knowledge or prophecy or teaching?”

So here, in v. 14c, we have a typical Pauline way to introduce an argument that denies what precedes. What is the argument? The unbaptized children of mixed marriage are holy. Who holds this argument? Of course, Paul. But the apostle brings this argument as a fact held as obvious by the Christian party. We can infer as well that the Christian party only shared a belief spread throughout the Church. So, Paul’s reasoning goes this way: you believe that children from either Christian couples or from mixed marriage are holy, how could you doubt that this applies as well to the unbelieving partner? One may be surprised that such a view was widespread in the Church. Today, in an individual society, the emphasis is on personal conviction and personal faith. But we have seen Paul’s Jewish background where being Jewish is belonging to the people of the alliance with God, and, in a similar fashion, being in a household where there is at least one individual who is Christian means staying in an environment freed from the world, therefore a saint environment³⁰⁶. This is what Paul has preached when speaking to “all the saints”, and this is what the “saints” have memorized.

It’s time to recapitulate our analysis of v. 14. After stating that a married Christian should not divorce the unbelieving spouse if the latter agrees in such a life (v. 12-13), Paul provides now his audience with an explanation (γάρ) supporting his position: as the children of a household, where there is a Christian, are saint by the very fact that they belong to the Church through the Christian parent, without the need of being baptized and expressing faith, in the same way the unbeliever, by becoming a single body with a Christian through marriage, belongs to a household that is part of the Church, and so is as well a saint. Therefore, he is separated from the world, belongs to the elected freed from its wicked environment. Paul’s view can be explained by his Jewish background where a Jew, by the very fact of belonging to the Jewish people, belongs as well to the alliance and the elected people, separated from the nations.

6. v. 15 Exception: when the unbeliever takes the initiative

εἰ δὲ ὁ ἄπιστος χωρίζεται, χωριζέσθω • οὐ δεδούλωται ὁ ἀδελφός ἢ ἡ ἀδελφή ἐν τοῖς τοιοῦτοις • ἐν δὲ εἰρήνῃ κέκληκεν ὑμᾶς ὁ θεός (But if the unbeliever separates, let him/her separate. The brother or the sister is not bound in such things. For God has called you in peace)

εἰ δὲ (But if), the conjunction *εἰ* (if) followed by the particle *δὲ* (but) is frequent in the Pauline corpus (37 times). This expression is well suited for moral judgment where each case needs to be addressed for its own sake (if this case, then...).

Let’s give three examples from 1 Corinthians:

- 4:7 “But if (*εἰ δὲ*) you received it (what you have), then why do you boast as if it were not a gift?”
- 7:9 “But if they (*εἰ δὲ*) cannot exercise self-control, then let them marry, for it is better to marry than to burn”
- 9:17 “For if I do this of my own will, I have a reward; but if (*εἰ δὲ*) not of my own will, then I am entrusted with a commission”

With *εἰ δὲ* Paul is introducing a special case that needs to be addressed for its own sake.

ὁ ἄπιστος χωρίζεται (the unbeliever separates). *ἄπιστος* is an adjective used here as a substantive and includes both male and female unbelievers. Obviously, it refers to the non-Christian party. *χωρίζεται* is the present middle voice indicative 3rd person singular of *χωρίζω* (to separate, divide, part, put asunder, depart, go away, divorce). The middle voice has a reflexive meaning: separating oneself from. We have seen previously that this verb is found 7 times in Paul’s letters, and it always appears in the context of a relationship.

- In Rom 8:35.39, it refers to the Christian relationship with Christ: “Who will separate (*χωρίζω*) us from the love of Christ?” (v. 35)
 - In Philem 1:15, it refers the relationship of Philemon with his slave Onesimus: “Perhaps this is the reason he was separated (*χωρίζω*) from you for a while”
 - And in 1 Cor 7:10.11.15 it refers to the marital relationship: “a wife should not separate (*χωρίζω*) from a husband” (v. 10)
- In the case of a legal marital relationship, *χωρίζω* means: to divorce. We have seen previously that *χωρίζω* and *ἀφίημι* (leave, dismiss, forgive, give up, hand over to, send away, let go, loose, set free, dissolve, disband, get rid off, leave alone) are synonymous in the context of marital relationship. Moreover, we have stated previously that *χωρίζω* is well attested as a technical term for divorce in the strict sense³⁰⁷. So, in v. 15 Paul is introducing the special case where the non-Christian partner asks for a divorce.

χωριζέσθω (let him/her separate) is the present middle voice imperative 3rd person singular of *χωρίζω*. One may have noted that Paul does not say: *χωριζέσθε* (present middle voice imperative 2nd person plural: separate). For Paul has no authority on the non-Christian. And so, he is saying to the Christian party: let your spouse go, if it is what he or she wants. One may say:

³⁰⁶ Senft, op. cit., p. 93, writes: “Pour que le raisonnement ne soit pas un cercle vicieux, il faut que la sainteté de ces enfants soit un fait admis et évident, au moins aux yeux de Paul lui-même. En vertu peut-être d’une « conviction juive » selon laquelle les enfants sont « inclus dans l’alliance ».

³⁰⁷ Murphy-O’Connor, art. cit., p. 605.

anyway, nothing can stop a non-Christian from divorcing, what's the point here? The point with the Christian party is agreeing or not with the spouse requesting the divorce. Paul says: you can agree³⁰⁸.

οὐ δεδούλωται ὁ ἀδελφός ἢ ἡ ἀδελφή ἐν τοῖς τοιοῦτοις (The brother or the sister is not bound in such things). *δεδούλωται* is the perfect passive indicative 3rd person singular of *δουλόω* (to make a slave of, enslave, reduce to bondage). We find only six instances of this verb in the Pauline corpus. If we focus on Paul's authentic letters, we can assign these instances to three different tones:

- A positive tone
 - 1 Cor 9:19 "For though I am free with respect to all, I have made myself a slave to all, so that I might win more of them"
 - Rom 6:18 "and that you, having been set free from sin, have become slaves of righteousness"
 - Rom 6:22 "But now that you have been freed from sin and enslaved to God, the advantage you get is sanctification. The end is eternal life"
- A negative tone
 - Gal 4:3 "So with us; while we were minors, we were enslaved to the elemental spirits of the world"
- A neutral tone
 - 1 Cor 7:15 "The brother or the sister is not bound in such things"

Paul uses *δουλόω* in a symbolic way; he is not referring to the fact of making someone a slave from a sociological perspective, but he is talking of a relationship where one's life is under control of someone else, may it be the community, God, Christian way of life, the power of the world, or the spouse through the bond of marriage. In v. 15 the tone is neutral, because it is related to the legal contract of marriage. The opposite of being enslaved or bound is being free. So, Paul is saying to the Christian party: in such a situation, you are free, i.e. you are no longer married.

Now that the Christian is free, can he or she marry again? We know the Catholic Church's position, called the Pauline privilege. If the unbaptized person abandoned the marriage by divorce or simple departure from the marriage or made life unbearable for the Christian and was unwilling to live in peace with him or her. If these conditions are fulfilled, the original marriage may be dissolved by the Church, and the Christian party is given the right to enter into marriage with another Christian or even a non-baptized person. The Pauline Privilege is still used in the Church's canonical processes³⁰⁹.

But what is Paul's view? Can the divorced Christian marry again? He says nothing, probably because the Corinthians didn't raise the question in their letter. Can we guess what he would have answered, had the question been posed in the letter? Some would tend to say that Paul would have asked to stay single based on the fact that in v. 7 he says "But I would wish that all men be also like myself" and in v. 11 "but if she happened to separate, let her remain unmarried". This is ill advised.

First, the reference to Paul personal marital status is probably coming from the Corinthians' letter as we have seen earlier³¹⁰. To ascetic people is proposing abstinence and maybe bringing forward Paul's marital status as an example, Paul is answering: not a good idea, you put yourself in position where Satan may tempt you through your debility and then you will fall in the pot of fornication. If you don't have the special gift of celibacy, forget about it.

Second, v. 11 where Paul asks a woman to stay unmarried is geared to a specific situation, as we have tried to demonstrate earlier³¹¹. Even though Paul is invoking the Lord's saying on divorce to resolve this specific case, he is not proposing a generic principle that applies to all married couples. This is confirmed by the way he addresses the issue of mixed couples.

In a nutshell, it is highly probable that Paul would have authorized a new marriage for all those who don't have the special gift of celibacy. This is the view of Conzelmann who says bluntly: "He can marry again"³¹². This is as well the view of the Catholic Church as we have seen with the Pauline privilege. But should we not go further and ask the question: "If Paul agrees that the divorced Christian can marry again, would he not add, as in v. 39: "only in the Lord", i.e. only with a Christian? The issue with v. 39 is that it is geared only to widow, and we need to assume that the fate of women in a mixed marriage is harsher than the one of men; otherwise, why Paul wouldn't have covered widow and widowed in a parallel fashion? Based on what we have stated in our excursus on marriage, we believe that Paul would have strongly suggested that the new marriage be with a Christian, due to the challenge of mixing two world views. But this question will remain open for ever.

Finally, we need to ask the question: How could Paul say on the one hand that someone should not divorce based on the Lord's saying, and then on the other hand, only a few verses later, authorize divorce to mixed couples? Where is

³⁰⁸ Senft, *op. cit.*, p. 94, writes: "Le conjoint chrétien ne dispose d'aucun moyen légal pour l'en empêcher et ne peut faire valoir pour le conjoint païen le commandement du Seigneur. Mais doit-il par obéissance au Seigneur refuser le divorce et maintenir une union dont l'autre ne veut plus? Non, dit l'apôtre : il peut dans ce cas consentir à la séparation. "

³⁰⁹ Msgr. M. Francis Mannion in [OSV Newsweekly](#).

³¹⁰ See our analysis of v. 12 and our quote of Hurd, *op. cit.*, p. 168 where he tries to guess the letter's content. His point is that Paul would have never by himself promoted his personal marital status, and if it is part of the discussion, then it was probably brought forward by Corinthians as an example to follow.

³¹¹ We were convinced by Murphy-O'Connor's analysis, *art. cit.*, p. 604

³¹² Conzelmann, *op. cit.*, p. 123.

consistency³¹³? A preliminary answer comes from the fact that the situation of the woman in v. 10-11 is totally different from the mixed couple issue in v. 12-16. Our analysis showed that v. 10-11 deals with a specific case of two Christians where a wife, probably known by many members of the Corinthian community, is unhappy with her husband (according to Murphy-O'Connor, art. cit., he may have become an ascetic) and is about to request divorce, if she hadn't done so yet. And so when Paul invokes the Lord's saying, it is to apply it only to this special case; he is not stating a general principle to all married couples. If we don't recognize this fact, then Paul's position becomes unintelligible.

But the fact remains: Paul has authorized divorce while the Lord forbids it. Murphy-O'Connor proposes his own conclusion: We are forced to the conclusion that Paul considered Jesus' prohibition of divorce, not as a binding precept, but as a significant directive whose relevance to a particular situation had to be evaluated by the pastor responsible for the community. Paul found it useful in one case but inappropriate in another³¹⁴.

In fact, Paul is not alone in qualifying the Lord saying and introducing exception. He is followed by the most Jewish gospel, the gospel according to Matthew:

5:32 "But I say to you that anyone who divorces his wife, except on the ground of promiscuity (*πορνεία*), causes her to commit adultery; and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery"

19:9 "And I say to you, whoever divorces his wife, except for promiscuity (*πορνεία*), and marries another commits adultery".

We have already analyzed *πορνεία*, and we have seen that, for Paul, it is so a serious offense that everything should be done to avoid it. A few have tried to weaken the meaning of *πορνεία* in Matthew by tying it to illegal union in Leviticus 18:6-18. This doesn't stand minimal analysis. First, the Septuagint translators never thought that this passage could be translated with the word *πορνεία* or the verb *πορνεύω*. Second, if the union would be illegal, how could it be performed in the first place? If there is no marriage possible, there cannot be any divorce. So, we need to conclude that *πορνεία* has probably the same meaning for the Jewish Matthew as for the Jewish Paul. In Matthew's Gospel, the Lord's saying is addressed only to the man, and *πορνεία* seems related only to the woman, which would mean a case of prostitution or adultery. So, for the Jewish community of Matthew, a man should not divorce his wife except if she has been found guilty of prostitution or adultery.

Now, how come both Paul and Matthew didn't take in a strict sense the Lord's saying on divorce, and felt free to introduce exceptions? The very fact that Jesus, Paul and Matthew were all Jews may provide a hint. From the Gospels, we know that Jesus audience were Jews. In a Jewish milieu, the husband had total power on his wife and only the husband could dismiss a spouse, and this on any ground, including the most trivial one. The wife had no rights. In introducing the story of Jesus and divorce, Mark (10:2-9), the first evangelist to tell this story³¹⁵, has the Pharisees asking Jesus a question: "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?" After Jesus asked what the Jewish practice was, they responded: "Moses allowed a man to write a certificate of dismissal and to divorce her". Finally, after explaining that Moses decision was due to their hardness of heart, Jesus provided his view: "From the beginning of creation, 'God made them male and female.' '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, they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore, what God has joined together, let no one separate". The core of Jesus answer is based on Gen 2:24. He presents a vision, God's perspective on things, as a prophet would do, not a lawyer.

But what did the early Christian community did with this prophetic word? By what follows, Mark (10:10-12) gives the answer:

10 Then in the house the disciples asked him again about this matter. 11 He said to them, "Whoever per chance (*ἂν*) divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery against her; 12 and if (*ἐάν*) she divorces her husband and marries another, she commits adultery."

First, by the very fact that the follow up on Jesus saying takes place in another location, more specifically in a house, gives us a hint that what is about to be said has a different setting, namely the Christian community where are gathered "the disciples"³¹⁶. Second, instead of a vision or a prophetic word, we are facing a legal declaration introduced by "if per chance" (*ἂν*): if per chance (*ἂν*) someone divorces his wife..., if per chance (*ἂν*) she divorces her husband; we are now in the world of casuistry. Third, while the original discussion with the Pharisees focused only on man's behaviour, now the legal declaration covers the woman as well, which would make no sense in the Palestinian setting, but makes total sense in the Roman world who was probably the primary audience of Mark's Gospel. So, in Mark we see how Christians felt free to evolve Jesus prophetic world into casuistry in order to apply it to specific situations, and to expand it to cover women as well who could divorce in the Roman world.

³¹³ This is exactly Murphy-O'Connor's point in art. cit., p. 606, when he writes: "The truth of the matter is that Paul is not consistent, and recognition of this point is of crucial importance for a correct understanding of Paul's attitude towards the dominical logion.

³¹⁴ Idem.

³¹⁵ It must be noted that, according to J. P. Meier, op. cit., p. 102-108, the oldest source of Jesus logion is the Q tradition of Mt 5:32 || Lk 16:18.

³¹⁶ We have here a typical Markan framework where Jesus would say something in one location, then in another location, usually a house, he would provide a more detailed explanation. The latter probably reflects discussions that took place later on in the early Church, meditating Jesus words. The clearest example is the parable of the Sower (Mk 4:3-9) where there is first Jesus' story, a simple description of the Sower's work and the outcome of the seeds depending on the type of field. But when the disciples were alone, the same story is retold (Mk 4:14-20), but this time heavily allegorized, explaining how Jesus words were received and why it didn't grow; we are now clearly in a Christian milieu.

Matthew (19:3-8) retells Mark's story but modifies the sequence. And what is noteworthy, he introduces the legal declaration with "λέγω ὑμῖν" (I say to you, v. 9), a solemn pronouncement used 52 times in his Gospel, then restricts the pronouncement only to men (whoever divorces his wife), which is expected in a Jewish milieu, and most importantly, he inserts an exception: except of fornication (*πορνεία*). How did he dare inserting an exception? One possible answer is related to his knowledge of the Jewish environment, and his insight on the scope of Jesus saying: by setting the woman on the same level as the man in becoming both one flesh, and asking to stop man's privilege of using woman as a thing that could be dismissed at any time, the prophet of Nazareth was stepping out of the legal tradition and resetting the focus on God's vision of marital union. This was revolutionary in the Jewish culture and a direct blow to men's privilege. We are not surprised to see then Matthew adding a pericope (19:10-12), unique in the Gospels, where the disciples say: "If such is the case of a man with his wife, it is better not to marry" (v. 10). So, Matthew distinguished clearly the vision of the prophet of Nazareth, and the need for legal application, where each situation needs be analyzed for its own sake; reality and its constraints do not destroy the vision. In this context, the Jewish community of Matthew didn't hesitate to introduce an exception that was part of their pastoral decision in regard of peculiar situations. And obviously, they didn't feel that this was jeopardizing Jesus' vision.

And what we have said of Matthew can be said in a similar fashion about the Jewish Paul.

ἐν δὲ εἰρήνῃ κέκληκεν ὑμᾶς ὁ θεός (For God has called you in peace). There is an issue with the particle *δὲ*. Technically, as we have seen, it has the generic meaning of "then" in a sequence of events or statements. But depending on the context, it can have the adversative meaning of "but, however", or the causal meaning of "for, because"³¹⁷. Here, translating *δὲ* by "but" would mean that the word peace that follows is a way for Paul to ask the Christian party to avoid conflict and be patient, even though the unbeliever wants divorce. On the other hand, translating *δὲ* by "for" would mean that Paul is providing the rationale for the divorce. Based on the whole context, i.e. Paul clearly stating that the couple is no longer bound, and v. 16 where Paul gives supplementary reason not to insist on the union, we can clearly decide that *δὲ* means "for" or "because" here; Paul is providing his audience with the rationale supporting divorce³¹⁸.

εἰρήνη is the feminine dative singular of *εἰρήνη* (peace, security, prosperity, felicity). It is found 43 times in the Pauline corpus. Knowing Paul's Jewish background, we can assume it is an important notion. In the Old Testament, it is known under the Hebrew word of *שָׁלוֹם* (*šālôm*)³¹⁹. Its root refers to completeness and integrity and can take different meanings: being well, healthy, without worries, having everything we need. It is used to introduce a conversation and inquire about someone's health (Jg 6:23 "But the Lord said to him, Peace be to you; do not fear, you shall not die"; Gen 43:27 "He (Joseph) inquired about their welfare (litt. he asked for the *shalôm*)"). *Shalôm* is also synonymous of success and happiness (Prov 3:2 "for length of days and years of life and abundant welfare (*shalom*) they will give you"). Of course, peace is the opposite of war and conflicts (Lev 26:6 "And I will grant peace in the land, and you shall lie down, and no one shall make you afraid"). As often the good news of peace summarizes the idea of salvation, the Septuagint translator used different variations of the Greek *σῶζω* (to save) to express the meaning of *shalôm* (Isa 52:7 LXX "as a season of beauty upon the mountains, as the feet of one preaching glad tidings of peace, as one preaching good news: for I will publish thy salvation").

When we looked at the different roles *εἰρήνη* is playing in the Pauline corpus, we can group all the occurrences in three categories.

- *εἰρήνη* is used for greetings, translating the Hebrew greeting of *Shalôm*, always coupled with the Greek greeting of *χάρις* (grace). A typical example is 1 Cor 1:3 "Grace (*χάρις*) to you and peace (*εἰρήνη*) from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ". This combination of Greek and Hebrew greeting is found 13 times in the Pauline corpus, i.e. in all the beginning of the 13 letters.
- *εἰρήνη* is an attribute of God, so that Paul can talk of the God of peace (1 Thess 5:23; Phil 4:7.9; Rom 15:23; 16:20) or the Lord of peace (2 Thess 3:16). This peace is associated with all the other expressions of the Spirit: (Gal 5:22) "By contrast, the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control". And it describes our relationship with God: (Rom 5:1) "Therefore, since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ"
- And *εἰρήνη* expresses our common understanding of peace, as opposed to disorder (In 1 Cor 14:33 Pauls reminds the spirited-people who enjoy speaking in tongues and prophecies that "God is a God not of disorder but of peace"), related to harmony and absence of conflict (1 Cor 16:11 "Therefore let no one despise him (Timothy). Send him on his way in peace, so that he may come to me (in Ephesus); for I am expecting him with the brothers"), related to harmony in the community (2 Cor 13:11 "Put things in order, listen to my appeal, agree with one another, live in peace"), related to mutual upbuilding (Rom 14:19 "Let us then pursue what makes for peace and for mutual upbuilding").

Of course, there is a relationship between peace that comes from God, and the daily life where order, security, harmony, mutual upbuilding is found; the latter can be the fruit of the Holy Spirit. But how all this can help us to understand what Paul means by "peace" in relationship with mixed couples in v. 15?

First, in v. 15 we have "*ἐν δὲ εἰρήνῃ*". The only other occurrence of peace with the preposition *ἐν* is 1 Cor 16:11 "Therefore let no one despise him (Timothy). Send him on his way in peace (*ἐν εἰρήνῃ*), so that he may come to me (in Ephesus)". As a reminder, we are probably in the spring of year 54, the report brought back by Chloe's people stunned Paul (an incestuous

³¹⁷ Senft, *op. cit.*, p. 94.

³¹⁸ This is as well the position of Senft, *op. cit.*, p. 94.

³¹⁹ On this, see Jean-Pierre Prévost, *Shalôm* in *Nouveau vocabulaire biblique*, p. 179-181.

marriage (1 Cor. 5: 1–8), drunkenness at the Eucharist (1 Cor. 11: 17–34)), and so the apostle decided to send Timothy to Corinth to investigate³²⁰. Why in concluding 1 Corinthians does Paul need to ask Corinthians to show respect to Timothy, not to despise him? It is probable that Timothy didn't have any gift for philosophy and eloquence like Apollos, he didn't have the authority of someone like Paul, and it is possible that the Corinthians were disappointed to see Paul not showing up himself; Timothy seemed to be a low-profile man. So, the risk was high that the spirited people would despise him, put on his way roadblocks and refuse collaboration whatsoever. By asking Corinthians to send Timothy on his way in peace, Paul probably meant to support him in his mission, to collaborate, provide him with what he needs, to avoid conflict, in a nutshell, to create a harmonious environment. If this is the meaning of *ἐν εἰρήνῃ* in 1 Cor 16:11, we can easily transpose it to 1 Cor 7:15 and to what should be happening in a married couple. In this case, the rationale for divorce provided by Paul is that married couples required a harmonious environment, where there is mutual support, collaboration, effort to meet each other needs and avoiding conflict, and if the unbeliever is not ready to meet these requirements, then divorce is allowed.

Then, in v. 15 we have the verb *καλέω* (to call): For God has called you in peace. We can find a parallel text in Col 3:15 "And let the peace (*εἰρήνη*) of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called (*καλέω*) in the one body". In order to understand what Paul means here, we need to look at the full context.

12 As God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience. 13 Bear with one another and, if anyone has a complaint against another, forgive each other; just as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. 14 Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. 15 And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in the one body. And be thankful (Col 3:12-15).

Paul talks about the "peace of Christ", which was grouped previously in our 2nd category. But it is addressed to Christians, called "God's chosen ones, holy and beloved", and then he starts a long sequence of exhortation related to compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, patience, forgiveness, and finally love that allows perfect harmony. When he mentions "peace of Christ", it seems to summarize everything that he has just said. But what is the purpose of all that? To live as "one body" to which "you were called". In other words, the audience is called to be a body or a community or a Church, and peace is what allows it. So is it possible that Col 3:15 can shade light on 1 Cor 7:15? We believe so. Paul seems to have the same criteria for married couples as for the Church: peace is mandatory. It is certainly related to his vision of Church as the body of Christ, and so everyone should be able to see through the Church Christ himself. And couples seem to be a mini-Church. This seems to explain why he doesn't hesitate to exclude from the Church those who break this peace (we need only to think of the incestuous marriage in 1 Cor 5). Should the same rationale explain why he allows divorce? We think so.

Finally, there is a text where "peace of God" recurs two times and may provide us with some insights on Paul's understanding of peace.

6 Do not worry (*μεριμνάω*) about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known (*γνωρίζω*) to God. 7 And the peace (*εἰρήνη*) of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard (*φρουρέω*) your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. 8 Finally, beloved, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think (*λογίζομαι*) about these things. 9 Practice (*πράσσω*) the things that you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, and the God of peace (*εἰρήνη*) will be (*εἰμί*) with you. (Phil 4:6-9)

We find "peace of God" two times, and each time it is in the future tense: peace of God will guard you (*φρουρέω*), peace of God will be (*εἰμί*) with you. So, peace of God is dependant on something. And these dependencies are expressed with a verb in the imperative tense, i.e. in order to receive the peace of God, we need to do something. The first "peace of God" is dependant on two imperative verbs: Do not worry (*μεριμνάω*) and let your requests be made known (*γνωρίζω*). The second "peace of God" is as well dependant on two imperative verbs: think (*λογίζομαι*) about these things, and practice (*πράσσω*) the things. What is noteworthy, we have a long list of Christian best practices: "prayer and supplication with thanksgiving", what is true honorable, just, pure, pleasing, commendable, excellent, worthy of praise, and this list ends up with what Paul has taught and done. But this long list is started by "Do not worry (*μεριμνάω*)", the only negative imperative of the text. It seems that, for Paul, there two are conflicting focus in life: if attention is on worries, it cannot be on prayers, or thinking about what is true honorable, just, or practicing what Paul has taught and done. Setting away worries is the entry door of the path that leads to the peace of God. How can this be related to married couples?

In our excursus on Paul and marriage, we have spent time analyzing 1 Cor 7:32-35 "I want you to be free from worries (*ἀμέριμνος*). The unmarried man cares (*μεριμνάω*) about the affairs of the Lord, how to please the Lord; 33 but the married man is worried (*μεριμνάω*) about the affairs of the world..." In our analysis, we have stressed the fact that *μεριμνάω* has two different meanings, one negative (to worry, to be anxious) and positive (to care about). And we have proposed the hypothesis that the negative meaning of *μεριμνάω* in the context of married people is related to mixed couples: two different world views are in conflict. And as Christians were a minority, the odd was that a marriage would be a marriage with a pagan partner, triggering worries on the Christian partner trying to follow Paul's path. This, we said, explains Paul reluctance on marriage. It is not an ascetic perspective or a stoic perspective³²¹, but a practical or pastoral perspective. In this regard, mixed

³²⁰ Murphy-O'Connor, *op. cit.*, p. 278-279.

³²¹ Against Balch, *art. cit.*, p. 436, who set Paul in the context of Stoics Antipater, Musonius and Heracles for whom marriage is helpful for some but not advantageous for others, and writes: "Paul's terms are that marriage makes some Christians anxious and distracted while celibacy makes others anxious and distracted... According to Paul, both are correct with respect to *some* persons (Christians) and incorrect with respect to others". We believe that if certain Pauline statements may look similar to Stoics, their rationale is totally different.

marriage can prevent peace, unless the pagan partner agrees to let the Christian partner go his or her own way. If we are right, then Phil 4:6 talks of the same peace as 1 Cor 7:15 when Paul says: "For God has called you [to live] in peace", i.e. your pagan partner would make you focused on worries preventing you from following the path I showed you.

We need to conclude that the criteria ("For God has called you [to live] in peace") is so important that nothing can prevail against it, even the Lord's saying.

7. v. 16 The limit of Christian influence

τί γάρ οἶδας, γύναι, εἰ τὸν ἄνδρα σώσεις; ἢ τί οἶδας, ἄνερ, εἰ τὴν γυναῖκα σώσεις (For how do you know, wife, if you will save your husband? or how do you know, husband, if you will save your wife?)

τί γάρ οἶδας, γύναι (For how do you know, wife?). *τί* is neutral nominative singular of the interrogative pronoun *τίς* (who, which, what, why, how). This is very frequent in the Pauline corpus (110 times). It is part of Paul's rhetorical method called *diatribe*. He likes to prompt his audience with questions, so they may think by themselves and find out what he says make sense. Let's give a few examples.

- 1 Cor 3:5 "What (*τίς*) then is Apollos? What is Paul? Servants through whom you came to believe, as the Lord assigned to each"
- 1 Cor 4:7 "For who (*τί γάρ*) sees anything different in you? What do you have that you did not receive? And if you received it, why do you boast as if it were not a gift?"
- 1 Cor 14:6 "Now, brothers and sisters, if I come to you speaking in tongues, how (*τί*) will I benefit you unless I speak to you in some revelation or knowledge or prophecy or teaching?"

οἶδας is perfect active indicative 2nd person singular of *οἶδα* (to know, see, perceive, behold, look, examine, investigate). It is used 103 times in the Pauline corpus as knowledge is important to Paul. But knowing the frequency on Paul's usage of this verb, we may ask: what type of knowledge is Paul referring to? When we scan all the occurrences of the verb *οἶδα*, we can come up with three categories that may be useful.

- *οἶδα* may refer to ordinary knowledge of past event or normal experience or shared by everyone:
 - 1 Cor 1:16 – Paul remembers of who he has baptized
 - 1 Cor 4:13 – Corinthians know that those who are employed in the temple service get their food from the temple
 - 1 Cor 4:24 – Corinthians know that in a race the runners all compete, but only one receives the prize
 - 1 Cor 12:2 – when they were pagans, Corinthians know they were led astray to idols
 - 1 Cor 16:15 – Corinthians know that members of the household of Stephanas were the first converts in Achaia
 - 2 Cor 9: 2 – Paul knows Corinthians' eagerness, which is the subject of his boasting to the people of Macedonia
 - 1 Thess 1:5 – Thessalonians know what kind of persons Paul proved to be among them for their sake
 - Etc.
- *οἶδα* may refer to the content of faith and requires faith
 - 1 Cor 2:2 – Paul knew nothing among Corinthians except Jesus Christ, and him crucified
 - 1 Cor 2:12 – The Corinthians have received the Holy Spirit, and so they know the gifts bestowed on them by God
 - 1 Cor 3:16 – Corinthians should know that they are God's temple
 - 1 Cor 6:2-3 – Corinthians should know that will judge the world and the angels
 - 1 Cor 6:9 – Corinthians should know that wrongdoers will not inherit the kingdom of God
 - 1 Cor 6:15 – Corinthians should know that their bodies are members of Christ
 - 2 Cor 4:14 – Corinthians know that the one who raised the Lord Jesus will raise them also with Jesus, and will bring them with him into his presence
 - 2 Cor 5:1 – Corinthians know that if the earthly tent they live in is destroyed, they have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens
 - Etc.
- *οἶδα* may refer to something that can be discovered through the normal process of reflection, logical thinking and analysis, or may refer to some kind of skills
 - 1 Cor 2:11 – For what human being knows what is truly human except the human spirit that is within?
 - 1 Cor 6:15 – Do Corinthians not know that whoever is united to a prostitute becomes one body with her?
 - 1 Cor 8:4 – Corinthians know that no idol in the world really exists
 - 1 Thess 4:4 – They should know how to control their own body in holiness and honor
 - 2 Thess 3: 7 – Thessalonians know how they ought to imitate Paul
 - Rom 5:13 – Romans know that suffering produces endurance
 - Rom 6:13 – Romans should know that if they present themselves to anyone as obedient slaves, they are slaves of the one whom they obey
 - Etc.

To what type of knowledge refers *οἶδα* in v. 16? Obviously, it does not refer to a past experience, and it does not refer to faith, but to a process of reflection, with a target that is in the future, as required by the verb "save" in the future that follows. And the structure of the sentence is like what we have just seen in 1 Cor 2:11 ("For what (*τί γάρ*) human being knows (*οἶδα*) what is truly human except the human spirit that is within? So also, no one comprehends what is truly God's except the Spirit of God"). So, we retrieve here a typical Pauline style, where the apostle appeals to human thinking capacity. Why does he need to do this? A possible answer is that the Christian partner in mixed couples in Corinth may have been hesitant to follow Paul's

advice, believing that by refusing the unbeliever's request to separate and waiting, things may change. Paul's reply would be then: by which process do you think this may happen? Clearly, Paul doesn't feel that something already lost should be pursued. As a pastor, he is realistic.

εἰ τὸν ἄνδρα σώσεις (if you will save your husband?). There have been discussions around *εἰ* (if) read as *εἰ μὴ* (if not). Conzelmann writes: "Since the Church Fathers it has been maintained that *εἰ* is to be understood in the sense of *εἰ μὴ*: 'whether you will not (after all) save your husband'."³²² This is obviously an effort to mitigate Paul's recommendation for divorce. And Senft notes that in the 20th century this view received some traction³²³. This is a desperate effort to reconcile v. 15 (they are not bound) with v. 12-13 (she should not separate); and the call to peace become a call to patience. This reading is not led by Paul's text analysis for its own sake, but by an agenda to mitigate the apostle's advice on divorce. Moreover, the whole context, as we have seen, confirms that *εἰ* should be read as "whether"³²⁴.

σώσεις is the future active indicative 2nd singular of *σώζω* (to save, keep safe, preserve). It is found 29 times in the Pauline corpus, mainly in 1 Corinthians (9 times) and Romans (8 times). In the Old Testament, it is related to the Hebrew *נָשַׁף* (*yāšā*)³²⁵ and means: to be liberated from a pending danger, a disaster or a visible enemy. In fact, it is often synonymous of military or political victory, especially in books like Judges, Kings, and Samuels. For Israel, the foundation event is God victory over the Egyptians and the crossing of the Red sea: "Moses said to the people, "Don't be afraid. Stand still, and see the salvation (*σωτηρία*) of Yahweh, which he will work for you today: for the Egyptians whom you have seen today, you shall never see them again" (LXX Ex 14:13). On an individual level, many Psalms will invoke God for help and celebrate him for his salvation: "Now I know that Yahweh saves (*σώζω*) his anointed. He will answer him from his holy heaven, with the saving strength of his right hand" (LXX Ps 19:7). After the exile to Babylon, salvation will be presented less in terms of victory over the enemy, but rather as a national reconciliation: "How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of him who brings good news, who publishes peace, who brings good news of good, who publishes salvation (*σωτηρία*), who says to Zion, "Your God reigns!" (LXX Isa 52:7).

With Paul, *σώσεις* move from a physical liberation to a spiritual liberation. When we discussed what he means by the world, we have seen that for him the universe is a wicked and toxic environment, due to men bad decision, and is de facto against God; born in such an environment, men inescapably become sinners³²⁶. It is in this context that Paul presents God's action.

8 But God proves his love for us in that while we still were sinners Christ died for us. 9 Much more surely then, now that we have been justified by his blood, will we be saved (*σώζω*) through him from the wrath of God. 10 For if while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of his Son, much more surely, having been reconciled, will we be saved (*σώζω*) by his life (Rom 5:8-10).

What is noteworthy in this text, Paul presents two aspect of God's action, one that already took place in Christ (we have justified by his blood, we were reconciled to God through the death of his Son), and one that is scheduled for the future (will we be saved through him from the wrath of God, will we be saved by his life). Let's have a closer look.

- i. To describe the present states, Paul uses the verb "to reconcile" (*καταλλάσσω*) with God, in the same way he asked in 1 Cor 7:11 the wife to reconcile with her husband. This means that the broken relationship has been re-established. And the apostle sees his work as a "ministry of reconciliation" (2 Cor 5:18). Another synonym is "to justify" (*δικαιώω*), i.e. to make someone righteous. To be righteous is the opposite of to be a sinner (Rom 6:18). Being justified, we have peace with God (Rom 5:1). Again, another synonym is "to sanctify" (*ἀγιάζω*): 1 Cor 6:11 "you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God". And finally, another synonym is "to save" (*σώζω*) or "salvation" (*σωτηρία*): 2 Tim 1:9 "(The power of God) who saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works but according to his own purpose and grace"; 2 Cor 6:2 "See, now is the acceptable time; see, now is the day of salvation!" This present state is dependant on one condition: to receive in faith the good news preached by the apostle (Rom 10:9 "because if you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved"; Rom 1:17 "For in it the righteousness of God is revealed through faith for faith; as it is written, "The one who is righteous will live by faith").
- ii. Even though the relationship has been re-established with God and we are reconciled, justified, sanctified and saved, there remains an unknown: what will happen on the day of God's judgment. Paul calls it the day of wrath, and it is unavoidable (Rom 2:3-5). So, even if "salvation" points to something present, most of the time it points to a future reality: Rom 8:24 "For we were saved in hope, but hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for that which he sees?" In order

³²² *Op. cit.*, p. 124.

³²³ *Op. cit.*, p. 95. A few scholars are mentioned: J. Jeremias, C. Burchard, C. K. Barrett.

³²⁴ Rightly so Conzelmann, *op. cit.*, p. 124: "But according to the context *εἰ* means simply 'whether.'"; and Senft, *op. cit.*, p. 95: "Une exhortation aux époux en instance de divorce tombe mal après le sec *qu'il se sépare* de 15a. Il est au contraire naturel et charitable de dire au conjoint chrétien qu'en consentant au divorce qu'on lui impose il ne se rend pas coupable: Dieu qui l'a appelé *dans la paix* ne veut pas pour lui une vie de pénibles querelles; d'autre part, qu'il ne surestime pas ses chances de gagner à la foi un conjoint qui veut son divorce".

³²⁵ On this see Jean-Pierre Prévost, *Yasha'* in *Nouveau vocabulaire biblique*, p. 239-245, André Myrie, *Sôtéria*, in *op. cit.*, p. 477-478.

³²⁶ This is used to be called "original sin". See Murphy-O'Connor, *op. cit.*, p. 336, who writes: "Wickedness became endemic, as sinners interacted with each other. All those born into a warped society inherit its defects. They have no choice but to internalize its values, and to pass them on reinforced to the next generation. They are enslaved to Sin, which dwells within them. Sin, for Paul, was not an extra-terrestrial force, but a reality within humanity, the accumulated power of lived assent to a false value system. 'God has imprisoned all human beings in their own disobedience' (Rom. 11: 32)".

word, the Christian is on the right track, but the ending needs to be seen. This is why, most of the time, *σώζω* (to save) is in the future tense or *σωτηρία* (salvation) refers to something up coming. Being a Christian is not a garanty of the final outcome. A typical example is provided by 1 Cor 15:1-2 “Now I would remind you, brothers and sisters, of the good news that I proclaimed to you, which you in turn received, in which also you stand, through which also you are being saved, if you hold firmly to the message that I proclaimed to you — unless you have come to believe in vain”. Even though someone could be excluded from the Church for whatever reason, what matters is being able to face the day of the Lord, as what happen to a man in Corinth: “You are to hand this man over to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord” (1 Cor 5:5). Paul himself begs for prayers in order to be saved: “For I know that through your prayers and the help of the Spirit of Jesus Christ this will turn out for my salvation” (Phil 1:19).

After this survey of Paul’s notion of salvation, we need to come back to v. 15 and Paul writing: “For how do you know, wife, if you will save your husband?” In which sense should “you will save” be interpreted? Even though the verb *σώζω* is in the future, it cannot point to the day of the Lord, for only God will be the active agent on that day, and *σώζω* is in the passive tense. On the other hand, in v. 15 *σώζω* is in the active tense and the active agent is the wife. So it refers to salvation as the initial state of the believer, and synonymous of reconciliation with God, justification, and sanctification. It is related to the reception of the Gospel. And so the wife plays here the same role as Paul when he says: “I try to please everyone in everything I do, not seeking my own advantage, but that of many, so that they may be saved” (1 Cor 10:33). We could rephrase v. 15 by saying: “For how do you know, wife, if you will be successful in convincing your husband to become a Christian”.

ἢ τί οἶδας, ἄνερ, εἰ τὴν γυναῖκα σώσεις (or how do you know, husband, if you will save your wife?). There is not much to comment other than mentioning that we retrieve the strict parallel approach of male and female we have seen in 1 Cor 7.

<i>τί γὰρ οἶδας, γυναίκα, εἰ τὸν ἄνδρα σώσεις;</i>
<i>ἢ τί οἶδας, ἄνερ, εἰ τὴν γυναῖκα σώσεις;</i>

This is the end of the sub section on mixed marriage that started in v. 12 where Paul mentioned first the husband, then the wife. Now, at the end, he mentions first the wife, then the husband. We may guess it is intentional, as he likes to alternate the subjects:

- V. 12 *brother* has an unbelieving *wife*
- V. 13 a *wife* has unbelieving *husband*
- V. 14a the unbelieving *husband* has been made holy
- V. 14b the unbelieving *wife* has been made holy
- V. 15 [if the unbeliever separates] includes husband and wife
- V. 16a how do you know, *wife*, if you will save your husband
- V. 16b how do you know, *husband*, if you will save your wife?

On top of focusing on the content of what he is saying, Paul seems to take into account the rhetorical style.

IV. Conclusion

Our long journey through 1 Cor 1:1-16 comes to a close. This was a unique journey as we were able to witness the conversation between a community and his pastor, revealing details on both. And now, we need to summarize our findings and look forward to the paths it opens.

Before detailing out our findings, we must set the context of this chapter. After reacting to what he has heard about what is going on in the church of Corinthian, Paul starts answering questions brought forward by some members of the community, and the first series of questions is related to marriage, celibacy and men and women relationship. Even though we don’t have a copy of this letter, based on 1 Cor 7:1-16 we can guess that the following questions were raised:

- What do you think? Some of use believe that, even for married couples, is it good to avoid totally sexual intercourses. And this is especially true in sight of your own personal status as a single
- Therefore, some believe that it is good for them to be like you, and so marriage should be avoided, especially if they are not already married or widows
- You may be aware of possible marital breakdowns, especially this woman who has an issue with her husband converted to ascetism
- In case you are not aware, your letter on not mingling with the unbelievers had a huge impact, and now people involved in mixed marriage are wondering if they should not divorce. What do you think?

Of course, this re-enactment of the Corinthians’ letter is highly hypothetical. But it has the merit of setting the context of Paul’s response.

But who are these Corinthians who tend to stay away from sexual intercourse or marriage to the point of even promoting divorce for those already married? They have received different names from scholars: enthusiasts and proto-Gnostics (Conzelmann), spirited-people (Murphy-O’Connor), ascetics (Hurd), scrupulous (Senft). We can assume that, as it often the case with new converts, they are typical examples of over-zealous people. And as it is usual the case when trying to explain a trend, we can see many factors involved, especially in Corinth, as we have seen, a harbour and booming city open to the world: in the Greek world Cynics philosophy with his promotion of celibacy and unconventional way of life was highly influential; similarly, the Jewish Hellenic ideas of Philo, of which Apollos was probably a vehicle, promoted distinction between the heavenly man and the earthly man, stressing the superior of the heavenly man over the earthly man, and considering the body as evil by nature and treacherous to the soul, putting forward the key value of gnosis, knowledge; and adding to the mix, there is Paul own

preaching that was enthusiastically apocalyptic, at least in the beginning, reminding his audience that the parousia is about to happen and the new life in Christ has already started, advocating the Christian freedom from the law and avoiding too specific moral directives, and setting a clear distinction between two environments, the church and the world. In this context, some probably took the road of strictness, others the road of total freedom. But both need further guidance.

A. Our Findings

1. The way Paul handles the situation in Corinth and answers the questions shows his special skills as a pastor. He seems to face overzealous Christians, believing that the resurrected people life has started and they should live like angels, or taking literally what he said about not mingling with pagans.
 - i. And his first challenge is to bring these people back to reality, to tone down their enthusiasm, without destroying their commitment. His approach is to say: "You are right when you say..., but". For instance, "You are right when you say: it is good for a man not to touch a woman, but because of the risk of promiscuity, stay away of this idea"; "you are right when you say that Christians should stay single as I am, but it is useless if you don't have a special gift; "you are right in saying that unmarried and widows should stay as they are, but it is useless if they cannot exercise self-control".
 - ii. As a realistic pastor, he knows that one size doesn't fit all. So, each situation needs to be addressed for its own sake. This is why in 1 Cor 7:1-16 the conjunction *if (εἰ or εἴ)* recurs 7 times: "Do not deprive one another, unless if"; "But if they cannot exercise self-control"; "if any brother has an unbelieving wife"; "And if a wife has unbelieving husband"; "But if the unbeliever separates"; "if you will save your husband?"; "if you will save your wife?". Paul rarely states generic principle valid for all people and all time.
 - iii. And as a good pastor, he does his best to give the rationale for his view; there is no recommendation without a proper explanation. Why should you have ongoing sexual intercourse? Because you belong to each other. And also, to avoid being tested by Satan and fall into promiscuity, due to your debility. Why it may be useless for unmarried and widows to be like me? Because if you don't have a special gift, you will run into the promiscuity test where you may be burned. Why should a Christian stay with the unbelieving spouse who consents to the conjugal life? Because the unbelieving partner has been made holy through the Christian partner. Why should a Christian agree if the unbeliever doesn't consent to the conjugal life? Because the Christian has been called to live in peace.
2. There is no doubt that Paul promotes the equality of men and women. It shows up when he talks about duties (the man should render what is due to her wife, and the woman should render what is due to her husband), about ownership (the husband belongs to her wife, the wife belongs to their wife), divorce (a Christian woman should not divorce, a Christian husband should not divorce). All along chapter 7, Paul's statements follow a strict parallel between men and women. Even though he disagrees with woman hairdo in the church, his motive is not the inferiority of women, but the fact it disrupts the tradition of his time and brings distraction in Christian testimony to the world. We may be chocked by his statement that man is the source of woman, and that the man is the glory of God, while the woman is the glory of man (1 Cor 11:3-7); but Paul is not stating the inferiority of woman, but only presenting who the first creation presents its vision of man and woman and their difference. And finally, when he quotes Genesis 2:22 to state the chronological priority of man, which gave way to misogyny in the Jewish milieu, he immediately talks about the priority of woman in giving birth to a child, which is as well part of God's plan in the order of the creation. As to 1 Cor 14: 34-35 where women are being asked to shut up in the church, we have demonstrated that this is an interpolation, and not from Paul's pen.
3. For Paul, Christian life in general, and marital status in particular, is not a matter of trying to reach an ideal or making effort to follow a model. It is a matter of living according to our charisma. As we have seen, by the very fact of believing, the Christian received the *charis* (grace) of God through Christ, also called the Holy Spirit, and this *charis* needs to grow, and it grows depending on the type of soil of each individual, and the flavour it takes for each individual may be called *charisma*, or special gift. Capacity to stay single is one of these special gifts. At the same time, he talked about the varieties of special gifts, using the image of the body: "If all were a single member, where would the body be?" (1 Cor 12:19). So all *charisma* are required, and together they represent the body of Christ. There is no such thing as an invitation to or promotion of celibacy, or stating it is the ideal or the perfect status.
4. All along his pastoral work, Paul's greatest concern is promiscuity, *porneia*, or any case of sexual immorality. We need just to remember his vigorous reaction with respect of man living with his father's wife (1 Cor 5) in Corinth when he asked to have him excluded from the community. In 2 Cor 12:21, he clearly writes: "I fear that when I come again, my God may humble me before you, and that I may have to mourn over many who previously sinned and have not repented of the impurity, sexual immorality, and licentiousness that they have practiced". So he urges the community to "Shun sexual immorality" (1 Cor 6:18) and conclude that "Sexually immoral... will not inherit the kingdom of God" (1 Cor 6:9b-10). Why is it so for Paul? This stems from his view of the body, *sōma*, which represents the chore of the human being, the whole person. As he puts it: "Every sin that a person commits is outside the body; but the fornicator sins against the body itself" (1 Cor 6:18). Moreover, the body is the temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor 6:19), and a member of Christ (1 Cor 6:15). So *porneia* is a blow to Christ himself. And this is so important to avoid that Christians should stay away from celibacy, or abstinence if they are married, if they don't have the *charisma*, the special gift. In this context, the reason for marriage may not appear on a very high level: be married, avoid *porneia*. This view could be shifted the other way around: be married, be healed. This comes from modern psychology that

highlights the structuring aspect of marriage, which would support Paul statements³²⁷; in this perspective, spouses may find ways to be healed from wounds that stem from infancy and find in the relationship what will fill their personal gaps, and from there they can grow together.

5. Having said that, the fact remains that Paul is often reluctant to see people getting married. Why is this? Of course, according to the Apostle, the appointed time has grown short, and the present form of this world is passing away (1 Cor 7:29,31), and so imagines the worst for the last days, and he knows that seeing loved ones in this situation will be heart breaking. This is a compassionate behaviour. But there is more. In the Greco-Roman world where Christians are a minority³²⁸, the odds are that the spouse would be an unbeliever³²⁹. For Paul, this is the recipe for the Christian partner to be anxious and concerned (*merimnaō*) about the affairs of the world, how to please (*areskō*) the spouse and his interests are divided (*merizō*). For, the Christian community and the world can only be two conflicting environments; the Christian partner may see his heart torn, facing a spouse that doesn't understand Christian value and behaviour. And "I want you to be free from anxieties" writes Paul. Again, another compassionate behaviour.
6. To be true, Paul's vision of marriage is extremely profound. It starts with a quote of Gen 2:24 ("The two shall be one flesh") that the spouses are becoming a single body, a single person. And as a single body, they belong to Christ, and are part of his body. When Paul asks the spouses to render what is due to the partner (1 Cor 7:3), he doesn't ask anything else than Rom 13: 8 "Owe no one anything, except to love one another". When he states that spouses have authority of their partner's body (1 Cor 7:4), he talks about the authority on the whole person, he doesn't mean something different than his own authority "which the Lord gave for building you up and not for tearing you" (2 Cor 10:8); so each one is responsible to care for, teach and influence the partner. And finally, this single body that marriage creates is so powerful that even the unbelieving partner is made holy and as well the children; the marriage builds an environment that protects from the wicked and toxic world.
7. Our final finding is related to divorce. Paul's statements may be confusing as he says on the one hand: "the woman should not let herself be divorced... the husband should not divorce her wife" (1 Cor 7:10-11), and invokes the Lord's saying on divorce to support his statement; but on the other hand he says: "But if the unbeliever separates, let him separate. The brother or the sister is not bound in such things" (1 Cor 7:15). As we have tried to demonstrate, the first statement is not a general principle that applies to all married people, but Paul's solution to a specific marital union issue in Corinth. Having said that, we can easily guess that, for Paul, the Lord's saying set the vision and the direction of all marriages. As a Jewish, Paul knew that the background of Jesus' saying, and that it was a prophetic statement restoring the full dignity of the woman and the goal of marriage in God's plan; it was not a lawyer's statement. And because of all that, Paul felt free to authorize divorce in a specific case where the dignity of the woman was not at stake, but the goal of marriage was in jeopardy, in a mixed marriage where the unbelieving partner didn't agree to live with the Christian partner; the separation between the Christian environment and the pagan environment could not be bridged. The principle invoked by Paul was: God has called you to live in peace. In this case, the rationale for divorce is that married couples required a harmonious environment, where there is mutual support, collaboration, effort to meet each other needs and avoiding conflict, and if the unbeliever is not ready to meet these requirements, then divorce is allowed.

B. Looking Forward

Two thousand years have passed since Paul wrote 1 Corinthians. Our modern world is different from what Paul was involved in. Many questions raised today couldn't even have been thought of by 1st century Christians. But Paul's insights may shed light on a few of our current issues. Let's look at two of them.

1. Divorce is an ongoing issue in the Catholic Church. Unfortunately, because the Church is an institution, the lawyers have taken control on decisions, and laws have been promoted to the level of doctrine. And in the legal world, only missing elements of a contract may end the contract, namely free will in the case of marriage. And so all requests to divorce, if successful, ends up in being marriage dissolution, where it is concluded that there was no free will involved in the first place, and so there has never been a real marriage, even after many years. This is a very convoluted way to say: partner's views are irreconcilable.

Paul offers us the key to make a sound decision. Of course, he made a decision only on mixed couples, and this decision has been known since by the Pauline privilege. But his criteria used for this decision could be applied to broader situations: the "you have been called in peace" covers any situation where harmonious environment, mutual support, collaboration, effort to meet each other needs and avoiding conflict is no longer possible and definitely compromised. And as Paul was convinced that this doesn't go against the Lord's saying, we can say the same today: Jesus statement was promoting woman's dignity in

³²⁷ In this domain we can mention Jack Dominian, an English psychiatrist and Catholic theologian (25 August 1929 -11 August 2014) who wrote so many books on marriage: [The Marital Breakdown](#) (1968), [Christian Marriage: Challenge of Change](#) (1969), [The Church and the Sexual Revolution](#) (1971), [Marriage Relationship Today](#) (1974), [Cycles of Affirmation. Psychological Essays in Christian Living](#) (1975), [Marriage, Faith and Love](#) (1981), [The Capacity to Love](#) (1985), [An Introduction to Marital Problems](#) (1986), [God, Sex and Love](#) (1989), [Passionate and Compassionate Love: Vision for Christian Marriage](#) (1991), [Dynamics of Marriage: Love, Sex, and Growth from a Christian Perspective](#) (1993), [Marriage: The Definitive Guide to What Makes a Marriage Work](#) (1997), [Let's Make Love](#) (2001), [Living Love](#) (2004).

³²⁸ Earlier, we have estimated the total population of Corinth to be 500,000, while Murphy-Connor, [op. cit.](#), p. 277, writes about the Christian population: "one should assume that there were at least 40 believers. There may have been many more"; this means Christians would be 0.00008% of the total population.

³²⁹ This was our main point in our Excursus on Paul and Marriage.

a context where she could be dismissed for any trivial reason, and re-establishing God's plan on marriage goal; it sets a vision and a direction, not a legal statement. Jesus acted as a prophet of God's plan and did not have to deal with the specific situations of a pastor. This is what Paul understood and allowed him to make the right decision. This is what the Church will need to understand one day: instead of playing legal games about consent, she will have to acknowledge that people of good have failed, and she will need to support them as they rebuild their lives.

2. We may be bothered by Paul's focus on promiscuity, *porneia*, and on marriage as a remedy. But, as we have pinpointed, he is a realistic pastor. He knows the human soul, he knows the strength and weakness of man as well the power of God's grace. Modern psychology has confirmed the healing effect of marriage³³⁰, and so supported Paul's recommendations. In this context, what would have been his position on homosexual marriage? Of course, in his letters, he has bad words on homosexuals: "Sexually immoral (*pornos*), idolaters, adulterers, effeminate (*malakos*), homosexuals (*arsenokoitēs*), thieves, the greedy, drunkards, revilers, swindlers — none of these will inherit the kingdom of God" (1 Cor 6:9b-10). And according to Murphy-O'Connor, one of the issues of 1 Cor 11: 2– 6 is related to the leading role of a homosexual³³¹. But all in all, Paul was dependant on the Jewish view of his time. Had he lived in the 21st century and had he known the root cause of homosexuality and its independence of free choice, wouldn't he not have made a different statement³³²? We believe so. And based on his concerns related to promiscuity, which is the case of so many homosexuals, we tend to believe that he would have promoted marriage for homosexuals as the remedy, as he did for heterosexuals.

We cannot conclude without coming back to the apostolic Exhortation *Amoris Laetitia* (The Joy of Love). The Exhortation has opened a small door for a new approach to divorced and remarried Christians by talking of personal discernment and forming conscience, which is a typical Pauline approach, as the Apostle is always insisting on scrutinizing or testing (*dokimazō*) everything: "test (*dokimazō*) everything; hold fast to what is good" (1 Thess 5:21); "Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern (*dokimazō*) what is the will of God — what is good and acceptable and perfect" (Rom 12:2).

The Exhortation has dedicated several pages on commenting 1 Cor 13 where Paul praises the value of love, which is in line with Paul's vision of Christian life. And the Exhortation discussed the topic of virginity and rightly set it in the context of Paul's personal choice, the coming of the Kingdom, and individual calling due to a special gift (*charisma*). All these statements reflect accurately Paul's thinking. But, at the same time, the Exhortation has only scratched the surface of Paul's positions on marriage and divorce, quoting his letters without any methodical analysis. Had the Exhortation taken a deep dive in the reconstruction of Paul's thought, its conclusions would have probably been more daring and enlightening. Hopefully, this is what we have successfully achieved.

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³³⁰ See our previous reference to Dr Jack Dominian.

³³¹ *Sex and Logic in 1 Corinthians 11: 2– 6*, *CBQ* (1980)42: 482–500, and *1 Corinthians 11: 2– 26 Once Again*, *CBQ* (1988)50: 265– 74

³³² There is something wrong with labeling homosexuality as "unnatural." Advances in research on animal behavior have revealed homosexual behavior in several species, to the point that it was featured in a 2023 article in the prestigious scientific journal *Nature Communications*, in which scientists reported observing homosexual behavior in 261 mammals. The subject has not yet been studied extensively, but it is possible—and even likely—that this behavior is present in 15% of animals, which would give us the same proportion as people born "left-handed." We can therefore no longer use the term "unnatural," but only that of "statistical minority."

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