

1 CORINTHIANS 7:1 IN THE NIV

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In a public response to an open question, I was once quoted (correctly) by *Christianity Today* as commending the NIV for being "gutsy" in its translation methodology.¹ I meant by that that they were willing to make tough choices about the meaning of texts and that they translated according to those choices rather than trying to escape through the safe route of ambiguity.

I still stand by my former applause. Being courageous in translation also has its obvious pitfalls, however, especially when the wrong choice misleads the reader as to the meaning of the text. There is one such text in the NIV that has regularly given me concern, especially so now that the whole Bible is available and the revision of the NT has neither corrected what seems to many of us to be a mistranslation nor offered even a marginal note to the (more surely correct) alternative.²

The text is 1 Cor 7:1, translated in the NIV: "Now for the matters you wrote about: It is good for a man not to marry."³ My problem with this translation is twofold: philological (the meaning of *gynaikos haptesthai*=literally "to touch a woman") and exegetical (the meaning of the whole chapter, and especially of vv 1-7). The purpose of this paper is (1) to present all of the available philological evidence, which seems so incontrovertible as to render the translation "to marry" to be without foundation; (2) to offer an exegesis of 7:1 in light of the whole of 1 Corinthians 7, which argues that the ordinary meaning of the idiom makes the most sense here; and (3) to suggest that such an interpretation fits well with current thinking as to the nature of the Corinthian false theology. If the reconstruction of the Corinthian position is somewhat speculative, it is not so with the philological evidence or the exegesis.

I. THE MEANING OF THE IDIOM

The idiom *haptesthai gynaikos* or its equivalent occurs at least seven times (excepting our passage) in extant literature from antiquity from the fourth century B.C. to the second century A.D. In all of these occurrences it is a euphemism

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¹See *Christianity Today* 21 (January 21, 1977) 42 [462]. It should be noted that I was not one of the NIV translators. Cf. my letter to the editor (March 4, 1977) 8 [616].

²My urgency to write this paper was finally prompted by a recent evaluation of "The Literary Merit of the New International Version" by L. Ryken (*Christianity Today* 23 [October 20, 1978] 16-17 [76-77]). He says: "And I hope it will dispel some follies to read that 'it is good for a man not to marry' instead of 'not to touch a woman.'" I fear that this translation creates even greater follies.

³The NIV is not the first so to translate. I checked over thirty of the nearly eighty English translations since 1900. Those that translate "to marry" are *Twentieth Century* (1898), *Weymouth* (1903), *Good-speed* (1923), *Williams* (1937), *Amplified* (1958), *Living Bible* (1962), *TEV* (1966). My reason for "picking on" the NIV is precisely because I think it is such a good translation and, contrary to Ryken (see n. 2), I wish to see it have long usefulness as a pew Bible. While it is true that no translation will please all the people all the time—and I have several other places where I think the NIV could be improved—for many of us who teach NT, and especially 1 Corinthians, its handling of this text seems to be a glaring error.

for sexual intercourse, and in not one of them is there the slightest hint that the idiom extends to something very close to "take a wife" or "marry." The evidence (in roughly chronological order):

(1) Plato *Leges* 8.840a: "During all the period of his training (as the story goes) he never touched a woman (*gynaikos hēpsato*), nor yet a boy." (LCL 11. 162-163)

(2) Aristotle *Politica* 7.14.12: "As to intercourse with another woman or man, in general it must be dishonourable (*mē kalon*) to be known to take any part in it (*haptomenon*) in any circumstances whatsoever as long as one is a husband." (LCL 21. 624-625)

(3) Gen 20:6 LXX (of Abimelech with Sarah): "That is why I did not let you touch her (*hapsasthai autēs*)." (NIV) Cf. Ruth 2:9 LXX: "I have told the men not to touch you (*hapsasthai sou*)." (NIV)

(4) Prov 6:29 LXX: "So is he who sleeps with another man's wife; no one who touches her (*ho haptomenos autēs*) will go unpunished." (NIV)

(5) Plutarch *Alex. M.* 21.4: "But Alexander . . . neither laid hands upon these women, nor did he know any other before marriage, except Barsine. This woman . . . was taken prisoner at Damascus. And since she had a Greek education, . . . Alexander determined . . . to attach himself to a woman (*hapsasthai gynaikos*) of such high birth and beauty." (LCL 7. 284-285)

(6) Josephus *Ant.* 1.163: "The King of the Egyptians . . . was fired with a desire to see her and on the point of laying hands on her (*hapsasthai tēs Sarras*). But God thwarted his criminal passion." (LCL 4. 80-81)

(7) Marcus Aurelius *Ant.* 1.17.6: "That I did not touch Benedicta or Theodotus (*mēte Benediktēshapsasthai mēte Theodotou*), but that even afterwards, when I did give way to amatory passions, I was cured of them." (LCL, pp. 22-23) Cf. Josephus *Ant.* 4.257: "Should a man have taken prisoner . . . a woman . . . and wish to live with her, let him not be permitted to approach her couch (*eunēshapsasthai*) and consort with her until. . . ." (LCL 4. 598-599)

Given this overwhelming philological evidence, one might wonder how the translators of the NIV and their predecessors ever translated the text "to marry." The answer of course lies in their understanding of the context,⁴ which sees the whole chapter as addressing the question of "to marry or not to marry" and vv 1-7 as an introduction to the whole. Thus it is suggested that on this question Paul prefers celibacy (v 1) but that because of sexual passions (v 2 interpreted in light of vv 9, 36) he concedes marriage (vv 2, 6). If there is a marriage, then there should be full sexual relations (vv 3-4) except for occasional periods of abstinence

⁴See, e.g., the arguments in F. W. Grosheide, *Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians* (NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1953) 154-155; L. Morris, *The First Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians* (Tyndale NT Commentary; London: Tyndale, 1958) 105-106.

For the translators of the NIV the context apparently included an understanding of 6:12-20 as well. One of the anomalies of the translation is that quotation marks indicating the Corinthian point of view are found only at 6:12-13 and 10:23 (at 8:1—but not 8:4!—there is a marginal note). Apparently, since they considered 6:12-13 to reflect the Corinthian point of view they cannot imagine that 7:1b could also come from Corinth.

for prayer (v 5). In v 7, however, Paul reverts to his initial preferences expressed in v 1. Since Paul so clearly affirms sexual relations in vv 3-5 it is hard for these interpreters to believe that he would deny them in v 1, and hence the idiom—with no philological support—is expanded into “to marry.”⁵

As common as that interpretation has been, it seems to be faced with several insuperable difficulties. Not only is the meaning of the idiom *haptesthai gynaikos* against it, but this interpretation leads to two further anomalies. First, it promotes an understanding of the whole chapter that seems to avoid, or abuse, the clear structural signal *peri de* (“now concerning”) in 7:25. Thus Paul’s argument is seen to move to and fro from celibacy and marriage (vv 1-7), to marriage once again (vv 8-9), to divorce (vv 10-16), and back to marriage twice again (virgins in vv 25-38 and widows in vv 39-40). Second, this interpretation fails to do justice to vv 1-7, since it sees the main concern (vv 3-5) as a digression and the surrounding matter as the main point.

II. THE STRUCTURE OF THE CHAPTER

Any valid interpretation of 1 Corinthians 7 must take seriously the probability that the *peri de* in 7:25 functions as do all the other occurrences of *peri de* in 1 Corinthians (8:1; 12:1; 16:1, 12; cf. 15:1)—to take up a new topic from the Corinthian letter to Paul. That seems clearly to be the case here. There are two recurring terms in vv 25-38 that control the discussion throughout: *parthenos* = “virgin” (vv 25, 28, 34, 36, 37, 38) and *gameō/gamizō* = “to marry” (vv 28 [2], 33, 34, 36, 38 [2]). The term *parthenos* does not occur in vv 1-24; the verb *gameō*, in the sense of “get married,” occurs in vv 1-24 only in v 9 in connection with the widowed, a theme to which Paul returns in vv 39-40.

There is of course a long debate as to the meaning of *parthenos* in this section. But at the very least it refers to a young woman who has not yet been married. Verses 36-38, which are to be seen as the conclusion of the whole section and not some additional special case (as by Conzelmann),⁶ make it abundantly clear that the *parthenos* refers to one who has not yet been married. Furthermore, the apparent distinction in v 34 between “virgin” and *hē gynē hē agamos* (= “unmarried woman”) suggests that the “virgin” is a special class of unmarried women distinguishable from others. The best solution to all the data is that which understands the “virgin” to be a young woman engaged to be married.⁷

But the significant point here is that in 7:25 Paul begins a new topic, dealing with the never-before-married as to whether or not they should get married. It follows, therefore, that 7:1-24 is most likely not dealing with marriage at all in the sense of getting married (except of course vv 8-9). What then?

The clue to 7:1-24 lies in the clear structural arrangement of vv 8-16, where Paul in successive paragraphs speaks *tois agamois kai tais chērais* (v 8; *NIV*: “to the unmarried and the widows”), *tois de gegamēkosin* (v 10; *NIV*: “to the mar-

⁵Morris, *First Epistle*, 105, simply asserts: “In this context *touch* refers to marriage.” Grosheide acknowledges that the idiom is “a euphemism for sexual intercourse” but then goes on to say that it is a “question whether or not one should marry” (*Commentary*, 155).

⁶H. Conzelmann, *A Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians* (Hermeneia; trans. J. W. Leitch; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1975) 134-136.

⁷There is a considerable tradition that sees this section as referring to celibate marriage (as in the *NEB*). For the most recent argument of this point of view see J. C. Hurd, *The Origin of I Corinthians* (London: SPCK, 1965) 169-182. For the point of view adopted here see J. K. Elliott, “Paul’s Teaching on Marriage in I Corinthians: Some Problems Considered,” *NTS* 19 (1973) 219-225.

ried”), and *tois de loipois* (v 12; *NIV*: “to the rest”). of the four classes mentioned, three (the widows, the married, the rest) are clearly groups of people who are now or at one time were married. W. F. Orr pointed out several years ago⁸ that the *agamois* of v 8 are masculine and the *chērais* feminine, thus continuing the balanced pairs from vv 2-4. He further points out, from *LSJ*, that *agamos* is the ordinary word in Greek for “widower.” And since widows would already be included among the “unmarried” in the term *agamos*, why should they be singled out unless they are the female counterpart to the *agamois*? This evidence, plus the fact that Paul takes up the question of the not-yet-married in v 25, makes a strong case for “widower and widow” as the proper meaning of vv 8-9. This suggests therefore that all of vv 8-16 is addressed to people who are or who have been married. If that is the case, then how do vv 1-7 function? Surely not as an introduction to vv 8-9 and then to the new topic of vv 25-40, but rather as the first step in an argument with the Corinthians about behavior within marriage.

III. THE MEANING OF 7:1-7

The heart of this paragraph takes up a very singular concern: mutual sexual responsibility within marriage. Indeed, as we shall see, the imperatives in vv 2-5 are directed toward married couples living in full marital cohabitation, and the single prohibition (*mē apostereite*, v 5) is for the Corinthians to “stop depriving one another.” One wonders therefore why Paul would take such a forceful stance on this matter, if he were merely taking up the question of “getting married” or, better, not “getting married.” The clue to all of this of course lies in v 1. But since our understanding of that verse is the controversial point, let us begin with v 2.

Verse 2. In many ways this is the crucial text. At least it is the context for those who think v 1 has to do with not getting married. All interpreters are agreed that the *de* (“but”) in v 2 has strong adversative force. The question is whether Paul is qualifying his preference for celibacy by conceding marriage, or whether he is rejecting the Corinthians’ advocacy of marital celibacy. All of the language of v 2 argues for the latter.

If v 1 means “not to marry,” then the imperative “let each man/woman have his/her own wife/husband” must mean that men and women should seek marriage. The problem with this interpretation—beside the difficulties in the words “each one” and “his own”—is that the idiom “to have a wife/husband (or woman/man)” occurs frequently in antiquity but in no known instance does it mean to acquire a mate.

For example, the idiom occurs eight times in the *LXX*⁹ and nine times in the *NT*.¹⁰ In some cases it has the minimal meaning of “have” in the sense that one has anything (with scarcely any emphasis on possession). Thus Absalom “had eighteen wives and thirty [v.l. sixty] concubines” (2 Chr 11:21; cf. 1 Esdr 9:12, 18). Sometimes in the *LXX* it means “to have sexually” (Exod 2:1; Deut 28:30; Isa 13:16). More often it means to be married or to be in continuing sexual relations with a man or woman. Thus Herod has his brother’s wife (Mark 6:18); the

⁸W. F. Orr, “Paul’s Treatment of Marriage in 1 Corinthians 7,” *Pittsburgh Perspective* 8 (1967) 5-22, esp. pp. 12-14.

⁹Exod 2:1; Deut 28:30; 2 Chr 11:21; 1 Esdr 9:12, 18; Tob 3:8 (BA); Isa 13:16; 54:1.

¹⁰Mark 6:18; 12:33 (=Matt 22:28; Luke 20:33); Luke 20:28; John 4:18 (*bis*); 1 Cor 5:1; 7:29.

seven brothers have the same woman as a wife (Luke 20:33); the Samaritan woman has had five men, and the one she now has is not her husband (John 4:18). Similarly Josephus (*Ant.* 4.259) rewrites Deut 21:14 to speak of the man as disdainful to have the woman as his spouse. More significantly, this usage with strong sexual overtones is found elsewhere in 1 Corinthians (5:1, a man is having his father's wife; cf. 7:29).

If this normal usage is also what Paul intends in 7:2, then the imperative "let each man/woman have his/her own wife/husband" assumes marriage and is encouraging that married partners continue marriage. This will involve both continuing in full sexual relationships (vv 3-5) as well as not dissolving marriages through divorce (vv 10-16).

This meaning of the imperatives in v 2 also makes sense of the other troublesome words in this sentence: "because of the fornications," "each man/woman" and "his/her own."

The term "each man/woman" along with "his/her own" has always created trouble for the traditional interpretation. The text should mean literally that everyone is to get married but only to his or her own spouse. Since that makes little sense, we are variously told that the terms "imply monogamy"¹¹ or mean "as a general rule."¹² There is no difficulty with the terms at all, however, given the ordinary meaning of the idiom "to have a wife." Paul simply means: "Let each man who is already married continue in relations with his own wife, and each wife likewise."

This interpretation also makes sense of the *dia tas porneias* ("because of the fornications"). The traditional view must make this mean "to avoid fornication"¹³ in the sense of premarital promiscuity. But much more likely this phrase is to be understood in light of the similar phrase in v 5: *dia tēn akrasian hymōn* ("because of your lack of self-control"). This latter phrase can refer only to extramarital sexual intercourse, since it is in the context of Paul's conceding temporary abstinence for married couples. Most likely, therefore, "because of the fornications" in v 1 has direct reference to 6:12-20, where men (probably married men) were going to the *pornai* (probably the temple prostitutes).

Verses 3-4. Given this meaning of v 2, then vv 3-4 further elaborate by emphasizing two things: (1) that sexual relations are a "due" within marriage (v 3), and (2) that there must be full mutuality in this matter (v 4). It should be noted in passing how totally unlike anything else one finds in antiquity (and even in many moderns as well) is the emphasis in v 4. Sex is not something the husband does to his wife. The wife "possesses" her husband's body in the same way he does hers.

Verses 5-6. Again, this emphasis on conjugal rights and mutuality makes little sense for the traditional view. But it makes full sense in light of the prohibition in v 5. It is true that the present tense of a prohibition like *mē apostereite* in Paul may mean nothing stronger than "while we are on the subject, do not forbid sex to one another either, except by mutual consent and for prayer." But it is much

¹¹See, e.g., Grosheide, *Commentary*, 155; cf. A. Robertson and A. Plummer, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the First Epistle of St. Paul to the Corinthians* (ICC; Edinburgh: Clark, 1911) 133.

¹²See C. Hodge, *An Exposition of the First Epistle to the Corinthians* (New York: Carter, 1860) 109.

¹³See, e.g., *ibid.*, who actually translates: "Nevertheless, to avoid fornication. . . ." Cf. also the comments by Robertson-Plummer, Grosheide and Morris.

more likely, given the urgencies of this whole paragraph, that what Paul intends is the full force of the present *Aktionsart*: "Stop depriving one another." For it is precisely such deprivation that they are probably arguing for and that Paul is here contesting. The point of v 5 is clear: Sexual abstinence within marriage is not the norm. It may be allowed, but it is only to be temporary, by mutual consent and for prayer.

In v 6, however, Paul makes it clear that such abstinence is not necessarily to be desired. It is only a concession—and most likely in this case a concession to the Corinthians' own position. To take the *touto* ("this") to refer back to v 2 is perhaps the most difficult feature of the traditional view, since it forces one to disregard Paul's emphases in vv 3-5 as almost irrelevant.

Verse 7. This is the sentence, of course, that has seemed to give the strongest support to the traditional interpretation. This is especially so since Paul seems to repeat the *hōs kai emauton* ("as I am") in the context of not getting married in v 8 (*hōs kagō*). But these two sentences do not necessarily refer to the same thing. There is little question that Paul is both single and celibate and that he demands celibacy of all singles. But celibacy and singleness are not identical ideas, especially in a context where some are arguing for celibacy (abstinence from sexual relations) within marriage. What then does v 7 mean?

Paul at this point seems to be affirming their position in v 1. But true celibacy as a *charisma* does not mean simply singleness. Rather, as Barrett following Bachmann argues,¹⁴ it means to be completely free from any need of sexual fulfillment. Celibacy of this kind, however, is a gift. It is equally clear to Paul that not all are so gifted. Thus in principle he can agree that it is "good for a man not to have relations with a woman." But this is true only for the single, not the married.

Verse 1. All of this leads us to argue, therefore, that v 1 not only means that "a man is better off having no relations with a woman" (*NAB*)¹⁵ but also, as many have suggested,¹⁶ that this is a position being argued by the Corinthians themselves in their letter. The basic reason for seeing it as their position is the fact that Paul so sharply contradicts it in vv 2-5. But who among the Corinthians was saying this—and why?

IV. THE CORINTHIAN POSITION

The current debate over the nature of the problem in Corinth to which 1 and 2 Corinthians is directed revolves around two foci: (1) The relationship of the party strife in 1:10-12 to the other issues addressed in 1 Corinthians, and (2) the nature of the Corinthian false theology. It is not my purpose here to try even to survey the give and take of these debates.¹⁷ Rather I shall simply state the positions that

¹⁴C. K. Barrett, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (HNTC; New York: Harper, 1968) 158.

¹⁵This translation is excellent in two respects: (1) It keeps the euphemistic nature of the original idiom; (2) at the same time it preserves the meaning of the original.

¹⁶See the table in Hurd, *Origin*, 68, for a partial list, which should also include Hurd himself.

¹⁷On the first issue see *ibid.*, 117-125, 155-158, 164-165. For a good recent overview of the second issue see A. C. Thiselton, "Realized Eschatology at Corinth," *NTS* 24 (1978) 510-526.

I find most convincing and then show how these might be reflected in Paul's answer in 1 Corinthians 7.

It seems most likely, as Hurd has argued,¹⁸ that the Corinthian letter to Paul is not from one of the parties in the Church but from the community as a whole. Furthermore Hurd seems quite correct also in seeing their letter as over against Paul (= "why can't we?" or "why shouldn't we?"), not as a friendly seeking of advice (= "Paul, what do you think about . . .?"). With regard to the Corinthian false theology I am persuaded by the view that sees their problem as basically an over-realized eschatology informed by an improper understanding of spiritual enthusiasm. While I agree with Thiselton that it is quite "unnecessary to resort to theories about gnostic influences there,"¹⁹ it seems to me most probable that some form of Hellenistic dualism entered into their understanding of being "spiritual."

If this is a correct view of things, then the problem in chap. 7 is probably a direct reflection of their over-realized eschatology combined with their Hellenistic dualism. On the one hand they were arguing that they should be living out their new eschatological existence both by abstaining from sex within marriage²⁰ (or by divorce, if martial celibacy will not work) and by denying marriage to the "virgins." This argument is reinforced by their low view of the body, reflected elsewhere in 6:12-20 and 15:1-58. This would be very similar to the position that Paul is attacking in chap. 15, where they are denying both a future resurrection and the bodily nature of such a resurrection (from their point of view, "who needs it?").

Thus they have taken as a basic premise: In light of our new existence it is "good for a man not to have relations with a woman"—even within marriage. Nor should the widowed (or unmarried) seek marriage, since they are already freed from it. And since abstinence might be too difficult for some,²¹ then surely divorce is a viable alternative—most certainly so when the marriage partner whom "one touches" is an unbeliever. This same view would also be the reason for their arguing that the "virgins" should never get married.

Paul's answer is consistent throughout. In principle he agrees with their premise: It is good, from his own point of view, for a man not to have relations with a woman. But he altogether rejects their applying it to the marriage relationship. Furthermore, divorce is not permissible except under the circumstance that the pagan partner seeks it—never the Christian.

In 7:25-40 Paul is caught in something of a dilemma. He agrees with their premise but disagrees with their reasons for holding it. Thus he cannot appear to agree overmuch, lest it reinforce their own false theology. As a result Paul makes some strong affirmations of marriage and gives some different grounds for celibacy.

¹⁸Hurd, *Origin*, passim.

¹⁹Thiselton, "Realized Eschatology," 525.

²⁰Hurd (*Origin*, 276-277) suggests that there might be a tie with Mark 12:24-25 and parallels—that is, the Corinthians were trying to be "like the angels" in the present age.

²¹Hurd, who divorces this section from the concern in vv 1-7 (*Origin*, 167), seems to miss the force of this argument. He says: "If Christian couples were willing to practice intramarital asceticism, then divorce would seem to serve no useful function." But it is precisely because some may have been unwilling to do so that their spouses would be seeking divorce.

Admittedly there is a real problem with this reconstruction. How does one explain 6:12-20, where just a few sentences earlier the Corinthians seem to have taken quite the opposite position?²² The usual response to this problem is that the Corinthian false theology, especially the denigration of the body, can logically move in two directions: asceticism (the body is evil, so deny it) or libertinism (the body is irrelevant, so indulge it).²³ While this is altogether possible—indeed, given their arguments in 6:12-13 and 7:1, most probable—one nonetheless wonders whether they might not have had a different view toward sexual relations within and without the community of faith.

It is of interest to note that in 6:12-20 every word reflecting the believer is masculine, while the *pornē* is clearly a female prostitute.²⁴ On the other hand everything in 7:1-16 is set out in balanced pairs so as always to include the female believer. And in 7:10 Paul's answer implies that the wife is the one seeking divorce—a known but rare occurrence in antiquity. It seems altogether possible that the wives are responsible for 7:1b²⁵ while at the same time they are urging their husbands to go to the temple prostitutes if they need sexual fulfillment. That is, they were arguing for “no sex” within Christian marriage (7:1, 5) as a reflection of life in the new age but for “free sex” down at the temples for those who had not yet attained new-age maturity with regard to bodily appetites. For those whose husbands still wanted sexual relations within marriage they would argue for the right to divorce.

V. CONCLUSION

It should be noted in conclusion that the exegesis of 7:1-7 is in no way dependent on the reconstruction of the Corinthian position argued for in this paper. Such a reconstruction is contended for only as making good sense of the data. The exegesis of 7:1-7 here presented, however, is contended for as the only interpretation that adequately deals with all the data of that paragraph. The idiom *haptesthai gynaikos* simply cannot be extended to mean “to marry.” The ambiguous “not to touch a woman” of the *KJV* is better than that. Preferable is a true dynamic equivalent, such as “to have relations with,” that keeps the euphemistic nature of the original and at the same time has the same meaning as the original.

²²It should be noted that the juxtaposition of 6:12-20 and 7:1-40 is a problem for any interpretation of the letter—except for those who deny the unity of 1 Corinthians.

²³See. e.g., W. Barclay, *The Letters to the Corinthians* (second ed.; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1956) 65-66.

²⁴I suggested earlier that this is probably temple prostitution. There are two reasons for this: (1) Paul's ordinary use of the temple imagery refers to the local church as a whole (1 Cor 3:16-17; 2 Cor 6:16; cf. Eph 2:21). Why then does he take the same image and here apply it to individual believers? Most likely because the temples were where the problem literally lay. (2) The phrase *pheugete tēn porneian* has its exact counterpart in Paul only at the other place where the Corinthians are arguing for going to the temples (*pheugete apo tēs eidōlōlatreias*, 1 Cor 10:14). See G. D. Fee, “II Corinthians vi.14-vii.1 and Food Offered to Idols,” *NTS* 23 (1977) 140-161, esp. 148-154.

²⁵J. Moffatt (*The First Epistle to the Corinthians* [MNTC; New York/London: Harper, 1938] 78) had earlier argued that 7:10 reflects the position of the “feminist party in the local church.” I have not found this suggestion taken up elsewhere.

The problem with this possibility of course is that in the slogan, “It is good for a man not to have sexual relations with a woman,” the “woman” has been narrowed to mean only his wife, while apparently it would not be true of prostitutes—hence the tentative nature of this suggestion.