

TO MARRY OR NOT TO MARRY:
THE INTERPRETATION OF 1 Cor 7:36-38

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Resumen

Tras un análisis del contexto existencial y el significado de este difícil pasaje, se propone una nueva hipótesis: el raro vocabulario que utiliza Pablo puede explicarse como un intento de traducir al griego, ante una crisis inminente, una serie de ideas y prácticas judías sobre los desposorios y el matrimonio.

Summary

After an analysis of the life context and the meaning of this difficult passage, a new hypothesis is proposed: the rare vocabulary used by Paul can be explained as an attempt to translate, in the face of an impending crisis, some common Jewish ideas and practices around betrothal and marriage into Greek idiom.

From the times of the Church Fathers, 1 Cor 7:36-38 has been a passage rife with difficulties for interpreters of the NT. In offering advice regarding the advisability of marriage for young engaged couples at Corinth, Paul employs words rarely found in the NT; one term, ὑπέρακμος, is found nowhere else in Greek! Added to these difficulties is a word which has stumped even astute readers: γαμίζειν in 7:38, according to the second-century grammarian, Apollonius Dyscolus, normally means "to give in marriage."¹ This meaning, however, does not fit the context of

¹ Apollonius Dyscolus, *De syntaxi*, 3.153.

1 Cor 7:25-28. If it is true that lexical meaning arises out of contexts, both literary and historical, then major interpretive difficulties within the text should be relieved if we can discover a plausible context for Paul's remarks in 1 Cor 7:25-38.

The present study will situate 1 Cor 7:25-38 within the cultural framework of Jewish Antiquity. Insights from philological studies by H. Lietzmann, W. G. Kümmel, A. Debrunner and W. Pötscher, will be combined with a new hypothesis, namely that Paul's use of rare and even unique vocabulary can be explained as an attempt to translate common Jewish concepts and practices around betrothal and marriage into Greek idiom.

We begin with a discussion of the cultural setting of 1 Cor 7, pointing to elements within the text which support a view that the Corinthian community observed Jewish cultural norms in questions of marriage, even if a large part of its membership was pagan in origin (cf. 1 Cor 12:2). The community at Corinth also seems, however, to have been influenced by certain Stoic ideas on marriage which were prevalent in the ambient Graeco-Roman environment of the day. Three well-known readings from the history of the interpretation of 7:36-38 will be introduced briefly in an effort to set this interpretive conundrum in context. They are: (1) the traditional church reading, which understands the father-of-the-bride to be Paul's addressee in these verses, (2) the theory which understands the text to be speaking about virgins, both male and female, who have entered into spiritual marriages, and (3) W. G. Kümmel's analysis, which presupposes the existence of a pneumatic sect which is pressuring young couples at Corinth not to engage in sex.

A recent study of the hellenistic background of 1 Cor 7 by Will Deming² will be reviewed and Gordon Fee's³ analysis of the structure of this chapter will provide a key reference point throughout. We conclude with a summary of the familiar and new elements adduced in favor of our interpretation, piecing them together in a way that allows new insights into the setting and significance of Paul's remarks in 7:36-38. The article ends with a translation of these verses.

² W. Deming, *Paul on Marriage and Celibacy: The Hellenistic Background of 1 Corinthians 7* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1995).

³ G. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (NIC; Grand Rapids, MI, Eerdmanns, 1987).

I. THE SETTING OF 1 CORINTHIANS 7

In 1 Cor 7:1-16:12 Paul is responding to a written document from the Corinthian community which, in turn, may have been a response to his previous letter mentioned in 1 Cor 5:9.⁴ In particular his response in 1 Cor 7 deals with questions about sexual relations between marriage partners, Christians involved in mixed marriages, widows and widowers considering re-marriage and singles considering marriage.

Since no direct information about the recipients of 1 Cor 7 is available, we must rely on indirect information gleaned from the epistle itself. The traditional view of chapter 7 holds that most of the argument given is best understood as a digression from the basic question as to whether or not Christians should marry.⁵ This question was raised by a community in crisis, one which was facing some unspecified economic or political distress of apparently apocalyptic proportions.⁶ The advice Paul gives in 1 Cor 7 should not be understood as a general treatise on marriage, but rather as an interim ethic, given in a context of great distress.⁷

Will Deming argues that Paul is addressing a community influenced by a Stoic view of marriage. Opposing the long-held hypotheses of both enthusiastic and gnostic influences at Corinth, Deming believes that "Paul's language and argumentation in 1 Corinthians 7 imply that the Corinthians to whom this chapter was addressed included Christians whose faith embodied a considerable degree of integration between Stoic and Judeo-Christian belief systems."⁸

Cynics and Stoics generally held opposing views on marriage. The Stoics esteemed the institution of marriage as one of the foundations of the city-state.⁹ The Cynics, on the other hand, opposed marriage on the

⁴ H. Conzelmann. *Der erste Brief an die Korinther* (Göttingen, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1969) 139.

⁵ E. g., G. G. Findlay, *St. Paul's First Epistle to the Corinthians* (London, 1900; reprinted Grand Rapids, MI, Eerdmans, 1961).

⁶ Deming, 214-215.

⁷ Paul's remarks on marriage in Romans 13:11-14, a setting in which apocalyptic expectations played a lesser role than at Corinth, lack the preference for celibacy, apparent in 1 Cor 7. Deming, 215.

⁸ Deming, 213.

⁹ The Romans shared a similar view: Augustus and his successors promulgated laws

grounds that single men could more freely devote themselves to philosophy and thereby achieve virtue and well-being.¹⁰ Some Stoics, however, admitted that special circumstances in a person's life, such as poverty or the outbreak of war, might force a person to forego marriage and concentrate on the philosophical life.¹¹ Deming sees a close parallel to the Stoic dispensation from the duty to marry in Paul's advice on marriage to the distressed Corinthians. In other words, when circumstances are dire and when it is in favor of a higher cause one can forego marriage.¹² Paul's higher cause was Christ and the dire circumstances were the "impending crisis" spoken of in 7:26.

Deming's assertions that Corinthian *attitudes* towards marriage were shaped in part by Stoic ideas has merit. While Deming adduces vocabulary and concepts compatible with Stoic influence at Corinth, his thesis does not enlighten us with respect to the cultural rules, regulations and laws governing marriage in that community. Because Deming, like many others, assumes that Paul is addressing himself to a community comprised largely of Gentile Christians in a Hellenistic setting (see 1 Cor 12:2), he makes the tacit assumption that some form of Graeco-Roman marital laws must be in effect there—this causes him to miss clues in the text which evidence known Jewish traditions around betrothal and marriage. The fact that this passage is formulated with the Graeco-Roman situation in mind does not imply that it accepts Graeco-Roman marital laws. With respect to the question of the rules governing marriage, E. Lövestam points out that Paul presupposes a Jewish framework in 1 Cor 7:10-11, within which the addressees are taught the radical will of God on marriage and divorce.¹³ While Stoic influences may have played a role in shaping the general attitudes of the addressees of 1 Cor 7 towards marriage, specific references to the ancient Jewish betrothal and marriage practices are clearly discernible in 7:25-38. In other words, traditional Jewish regula-

which included penalties for non-marriage and childlessness and rewards for fecundity. See Margaret Y. MacDonald "Women Holy in Body and Spirit: The Social Setting of 1 Corinthians 7": *NTS* 36 (1990) 161-181, 177.

¹⁰ Deming, 3.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ E. Lövestam, "Divorce and Marriage in the New Testament": *The Jewish Law Annual* 4 (1981) 47-65. 61. Cf. 1 Cor 7:10.

tions on marriage were still considered binding for the Corinthian Christians at the time Paul wrote.

Jewish Betrothal and Marriage in Antiquity

The Jewish practice of betrothal in Antiquity, implicit in some biblical passages and spelled out in later rabbinic documents,¹⁴ differs greatly from the modern practice of an engagement to marry. Jewish marriage took place in two steps: a formal exchange of consent before witnesses, i.e., the betrothal (Mal 2:14), and the subsequent taking of the bride to the groom's family home (Matt 1:18-25). According to Jewish law, betrothed couples were already legally married and no distinction was made between a fiancée and a wife.¹⁵ The betrothal gave the young man rights over the young woman and any infringement of the man's marital rights could be punished as adultery.¹⁶ In fact, the dissolution of a betrothal required a divorce in the Jewish culture of the period (*Mishnah Qiddushin [MQid]* 4:9).¹⁷ Sexual relations appear to have been permitted for betrothed couples in Judea, whereas in Galilee the girl was expected to be a virgin as she was transferred to her husband's house (*Mishnah Ketubot [MKet]* 1:5).¹⁸

The first chapter of *MQid* is quite revealing with respect to the social position of the female in Jewish society. Chapter one lists the ways in which acquisition is made of various sorts of property — women, slaves, real property, movables. Wives were "acquired" through betrothal, which was the act by which a Jewish man set a woman aside for himself.

I. A. A woman is acquired [as a wife] in three ways, and acquires [freedom for] herself [to be a free agent] in two ways.

¹⁴ See J. Jeremias, *Jerusalem in the Time of Jesus* (Philadelphia, Fortress, 1969) 365-368.

¹⁵ P. Gaechter, *Maria im Erdenleben* (Innsbruck, Marianischer Verlag, 1955) 83. Gaechter offers a collage of citations from Knabenbauer, P. Dausch and C. G. Montefiore in support of this assertion.

¹⁶ R. Brown, *The Birth of the Messiah* (Garden City, Doubleday, 1993) 123.

¹⁷ W. G. Kümmel, "Verlobung und Heirat bei Paulus", *Neotestamentliche Studien für R. Bultmann* (Berlin, Töpelmann, 1957) 292.

¹⁸ Gaechter explains the Judean practice as an attempt to avoid the deflowering of Jewish virgins on their wedding night by the Roman overlords who, among conquered peoples, claimed the right of "first night," or the *droit de cuissage*. Gaechter, 87-88.

B. She is acquired through money, a writ, and sexual intercourse.¹⁹

In general, the rights and privileges around marriage seem to have been the rights and privileges of the men involved, whether the groom or the father-of-the-bride. If the bride was treated improperly, ultimately it was the father or the groom who was compensated for injury or damage.

Financial considerations were important throughout the entire marriage process. The groom had to pay his father-in-law a specified brideprice,²⁰ and in turn, received a dowry with his bride; both transactions were regulated by the bride's father.²¹ Before marriage, a female fell under the authority of her father, until she changed households, at which time her husband assumed her support.²² If the bride was presented as a virgin but did not "have the tokens of virginity" on the wedding night, the groom could seek financial compensation, except in cases of rape, physical injury to the bride, or when the groom himself was suspected of having deflowered his betrothed (*MKet* 1:5-9). In accordance with Deut 22:28-29 (see also *MKet* 3), if the girl was raped or seduced, the father of the girl and not the girl herself was paid a fine! The seducer was obliged to pay a fine for the shame and the damage, while the rapist had to pay, in addition, for the pain inflicted (*MKet* 3:4). In assessing the compensation for the damage, the girl was regarded as if she were a slave for sale. The damages were assessed as the difference in value between a virgin and a deflowered slave (*MKet* 3:7).²³

The betrothal of a *Q'tanna*, a girl under 12, and of a *Na'ara*, a girl between 12 years and 12 1/2 years, lay entirely in the hands of her father.²⁴ At 12 1/2 years old, the girl was considered to have reached marriageable age and the girl's father was admonished to give her in marriage as soon as possible.²⁵ Once betrothed, the wife-to-be continued

¹⁹ J. Neusner, *A History of the Mishnaic Law of Women: Part Four - Sotah, Gittin, Qiddushin*, trans. and explanation (Leiden, E. J. Brill, 1980) 217.

²⁰ Virgins and widows attracted different bride-prices. The brideprice was specified for each in *Mishnah Ketubot* 1:2-4.

²¹ Gaechter, 84.

²² Brown, 124.

²³ According to Exod 21:7, fathers had the right to sell their daughters as slaves. See also *MKet* 3:8.

²⁴ Gaechter, 84.

²⁵ H. L. Strack / P. Billerbeck, *Kommentar zum Neuen Testament aus Talmud und*

to live in her fathers home for about a year, at which time the formal transferal to the husband's home took place.²⁶

While the social status of the female seems undoubtedly to have been inferior to that of the male in the Jewish regulations surrounding betrothal and marriage, these rules served the important social function of ensuring the welfare of females. The father, in giving his daughter in marriage, was freed from the upkeep of his daughter but could rest assured that her daily needs would be satisfied. Before the wedding ceremony took place, the groom had to present the bride with a written document called the *ketubah*, in which his duties as husband were outlined. While the first obligation of the husband was to provide a grant to his wife in the case of divorce or death, other unwritten obligations included support, conjugal rights, medical care, and even ransom in the case of kidnapping.²⁷ The groom, in addition to new duties *vis-à-vis* his bride, also assumed the rights which her father had formerly exercised over her. His bride became *his* (technically on the day of betrothal) and effectively on the day of marriage. In exchange for the husband's duties towards his wife, she had the duty to perform certain services for him.²⁸

Legal rules made betrothal and marriage contracts predictable. Any threat to the established norms risked becoming a threat to the good order of the entire community. As we will see later, in 1 Cor 7:36 Paul is responding to just such a threat to the good order of the community.

Margaret MacDonald, in her treatment of the social background of 1 Cor 7, seems to completely sidestep the possibility that the setting might be one in which Jewish or Jewish-Christian cultural practises were dominant. She speaks throughout her article exclusively of Graeco-Roman attitudes and laws governing marriage. As we will see below, this starting point leaves her, and others who choose this path, unable to explain some

Midrasch. III. Die Briefe des Neuen Testaments und die Offenbarung Johannis (München, C. H. Beck'sche, 1954) 377.

²⁶ Brown, 124-125.

²⁷ J. Hauptman, "Images of Women in the Talmud," in R. R. Ruether (ed.), *Religion and Sexism: Images of Women in the Jewish and Christian Traditions* (New York, Simon and Schuster, 1974) 183-212, 186.

²⁸ Hauptman, 187. Some of the duties were: the washing of his face, hands and feet; child rearing and housework; spinning and weaving; sewing clothes; the surrender of income from handicrafts.

important elements of 1 Cor 7. Following the lead of Wayne Meeks, MacDonald speaks of the behaviour of certain wealthy widows and other exceptional Graeco-Roman women who were not bound to men in permanent relationships.²⁹ It must be noted, however, that these women were indeed "exceptional" and that the vast majority of women did not share this high level of autonomy in Antiquity. Women may have been achieving more autonomy and a greater role within this new "Jewish" sect, but this in no way implies that the rules governing marriage were simply adopted from the dominant culture while Jewish cultural practices were abandoned. Given the Jewish origins of the sect, it is likely that Jewish cultural practices and norms endured for some time after its ranks had become swollen by pagan converts. Moreover, Paul's attitudes of restraint with regard to the roles played by women in 1 Cor 11 and 14 point to cultural elements more at home in Judaism. We concur with C. F. Parvey's comment about Paul's position on women in First Corinthians:

On the theological level, by envisioning the new interdependence of men and women in Christ, Paul makes a fundamental breakthrough in new images for women, but on the cultural, social level, he clearly identifies himself as a first-century Jewish teacher for whom arguments from custom have authority and validity of their own.³⁰

Parvey notes that in the final analysis, "it is not theology but established custom that seems to have won the day."³¹

But how does holding on to Jewish marriage customs and legal regulations square with Paul's general argument elsewhere, that the Law has been superseded (cf. Galatians)? It seems natural that Christians, who likely saw their faith in Jesus as fundamentally indebted to a Jewish heritage, should retain certain everyday practices emanating from those Jewish roots. Why would this "Jewish" sect so quickly jettison its own marital traditions in favour of those of the surrounding pagan world?

²⁹ See MacDonald, 180, and W. Meeks, *The First Urban Christians: The Social World of the Apostle Paul* (New Haven, Yale University Press, 1983) 71.

³⁰ C. F. Parvey, "The Theology and Leadership of Women in the New Testament", in *Religion and Sexism...*, o. c., 117-149, 128.

³¹ Parvey, 127.

II. THE STRUCTURE AND CONTENT OF 1 CORINTHIANS 7

Gordon Fee's analysis of 1 Cor 7 demonstrates that at least two distinct concerns are discernible in Paul's answer to the Corinthians written queries: one in vv. 1-16; the other in vv. 25-40. Five points adduced in support of his new appraisal are:³² (1) *περί δέ* introduces a new topic in 1 Cor 7:25³³; (2) In 7:25-40, "virgins" appears six times and "getting married" eight times, while in 7:1-24, "virgins" does not appear at all and "getting married" appears only twice; (3) 7:1-16 contains advice to four categories of the married and widowed. (4) The controlling motif linking 1 Cor 7:1-16 and 1 Cor 7:25-40 is Paul's answer, "Do not seek a change in status"; (5) The moral argument which the Corinthians have put to Paul in 7:1b ("It is good for a man not to touch a woman") provides the backdrop for the entirety of Paul's advice in 1 Cor 7. In 7:25-38, the never-before-married are advised to stay unfettered, and in 7:39-40 married women are told to stick to their commitments until the death of their spouse; if widowed, they should preferably remain unmarried.

1 Cor 7:17-24 contains the eschatological norm upon which the entire argument of 1 Cor 7 is built, even though the subject matter of 7:17-24 does not address the question of marriage. In 7:24 we find the connective tissue of the entire chapter, "In whatever condition you were called, brothers and sisters, there remain with God."³⁴ This theme recurs in every subsection (1 Cor 7:2, 8, 10, 11, 12-16, 26-27, 37, 40)³⁵.

The Christians at Corinth seemed to be asking whether or not sex ought to have any place in the life of the Christian.³⁶ Paul responds to the married with a command he has from the Lord — they should not divorce (7:10-11); moreover, they must have real marriages with full conjugal rights (7:3-5). Paul counsels the *ἀγάμοι* (7:8), the widows (7:8) and the never-before-married (7:27) to remain single. In all cases, however, he allows for genuine exceptions to his own preference.

³² Fee, 268.

³³ Consistent with its use in 1 Cor 7:1, 8:1, 12:1, 16:1, 12.

³⁴ So Conzelmann, 138 and Fee, 268.

³⁵ Fee, 306-322.

³⁶ V. P. Furnish, *The Moral Teaching of Paul* (Nashville, Abingdon, 1979) 30.

1 Corinthians 7:25-40

Vincent Wimbush, after a detailed study of 1 Cor 7:25-35, concludes with the following remarks about Paul's advice to the Corinthians regarding sex, marriage and the Christian life:

It is in grappling with this pastoral problem that Paul hits upon and makes use of the stereotyped prophetic-eschatological speech. This he uses... toward the relativizing of the rigoristic views of some of the Corinthians. Thus the relativizing argument (ὡς μή = ἀμερίμνος) is used not for debunking but for accepting involvement in the structures of the world, with the proviso that concern for the "things of the Lord" takes priority.³⁷

Wimbush's comments with regard to the ὡς μή principle in vv. 25-35 are applicable to vv. 36-38. Although Christians live in the world, Paul calls them to a lifestyle detached from it in order to devote themselves to the "things of the Lord." "From now on, let even those who have wives be as though they had none" (7:29)." This sense of detachment, even in the affairs of marriage, sounds strange to readers for whom it is not at all clear that "the appointed time has grown short (29)." Nevertheless, this sense of detachment even in the affairs of marriage is clearly Paul's advice in 7:29.

The use of the term "virgins" in 7:28, 34, 36-38 (which in all three passages almost certainly means betrothed), signals that the entire section is a single response to one issue.³⁸ What is begun in 7:26 is brought to a conclusion with the strong inferential conjunction ὥστε in 7:38.

When Paul addresses himself to the question of the virgins (the παρθένου) in 25-38, he is speaking of a different category of people from those whom he addresses as the "unmarried" in 7:8 and 7:11. In 7:8, Paul speaks of the ἀγάμοις and in 7:11, he tells the woman who has separated from her husband that she should remain unmarried, ἀγάμος. Ἀγάμοις can mean generally "unmarried men and women" but in 7:8, the term is used in parallel with "widows" and probably simply refers to "widowers." Women could not initiate divorce under Jewish law,³⁹ and accordingly,

³⁷ V. Wimbush, *Paul: The Worldly Ascetic* (Macon, Mercer University Press, 1987) 96.

³⁸ Fee, 323.

³⁹ Hauptman 189. Cf. Deut 24.1.

Paul's admonition not to divorce in 7:11 is addressed exclusively to men. In the same verse, when addressing women, Paul speaks only of the possibility for them to separate from their husbands. This is confirmation of the fact that Jewish laws and customs surrounding marriage were in effect in the community Paul addresses at Corinth, since, unlike their Jewish counterparts, women in the Roman Empire could divorce and often did.⁴⁰

In 7:25-38, Paul is addressing the never-before-married, a category of people different from the ἀγάμοις/ἀγάμος in 7:8 and 7:11. Immediately after changing the topic in 7:25 – "περὶ δὲ τῶν παρθένων" – Paul begins to speak about those who are bound to wives and those who are not (7:27). If Paul is addressing the "never-before-married", how does one explain his talk about those who are bound to wives and those who are not? If Jewish betrothal and marriage are understood to be backdrop for these comments, an easy solution is available. Two classes of the never-before-married are possible: 1) the man who has already betrothed a wife to himself, i.e., the man who has already set a woman aside for himself and who is thus already bound to her in the first step of a two-step marriage process and, 2) the man who has not yet betrothed a woman to himself, and who is thus not bound to a woman. Since, under Jewish law, only the groom could initiate betrothal (the girl or woman could not),⁴¹ Paul addresses his comments to the man in 7:27, 28, 29, 32, 33, 36, 37, 38.

The backdrop for the entire discussion of 7:25-40 seems clearly to be Jewish customs and laws around marriage and betrothal. Paul does not start giving advice to the never-before-married in 7:25, only to break with this train of thought in 7:27 by giving counsel to a whole other category he had already dealt with in 7:8 (the once-married-but-now-single). In speaking about those who are bound to wives and those who are not, he is still addressing the never-before-married.

Paul is on the horns of a dilemma: he is known to favour celibacy and yet he must present his preference in such nuanced terms as to preclude a misinterpretation of his position. Despite his preference for celibacy Paul affirms the goodness of marriage. In view of the "impending crisis,"

⁴⁰ Parvey, 119.

⁴¹ Hauptman, 186.

however, Paul offers this counsel to all: "stay as you were when you were called" (7:24). But what exactly would that mean in the case of the betrothed? Should the engaged couple break off the engagement, go ahead with the marriage, or maintain a kind of extended betrothal (which would resemble a spiritual marriage, leaving the woman still on her father's hands)?

Three approaches have been proposed to 1 Cor 7:25-40. All three readings hang on how one reads 7:36-38, and all three leave some of the difficulties of the text unexplained.

Position #1. The traditional view, which dates from the Patristic era, reads the passage as addressing the father of the bride who gives his virgin daughter in marriage.⁴² This position rests on reading the verb *γαμίζειν* as referring specifically to the notion of "giving in marriage," as in Matt 24:38. Church Fathers translated the passage in this way or sometimes changed the word in the text, thus avoiding the difficulty. The single variant which appears in the tradition, *ἐκγαμίζων*, is also attested by Clement of Alexandria.⁴³

Position #2. The second position, defended in modern times by H. Achelis and supported by many scholars, understands the term "virgin" to refer to both men and women who are committed to one another in a spiritual marriage, i.e., with no sexual relations.⁴⁴

Position #3. W. G. Kümmel understands "virgins" in 7:36-38 to refer to some young betrothed women who along with their fiancées were being pressured by Corinthian pneumatics not to consummate their marriages, i.e., not to go through with the weddings and thus not to have sexual relations.⁴⁵ The supposition that there were pneumatics at Corinth is unnecessary for an explanation of the text. A more plausible alternative to the creation of a phantom sect is available — Paul's own stance *vis-à-vis* celibacy has been misinterpreted by some ascetically-minded Corinthians. A detailed treatment of 7:36-38 is now in order.

⁴² Cf. *La Bible de Jérusalem*, note *i* dealing with verses 36-38.

⁴³ *Novum Testamentum Graece*, ed. E. Nestle, K. Aland (26th edition). See textual apparatus 7:38.

⁴⁴ H. Achelis, *Virgines Subintroductae: ein Beitrag zum VII Kapitel des I Korintherbriefs* (Leipzig, Hinrichs, 1902).

⁴⁵ Kümmel, 289.

1 Corinthians 7:36-38

7:36 Εἰ δέ τις ἀσχημονεῖν ἐπὶ τὴν παρθένον αὐτοῦ νομίζει ἐὰν ἦ ὑπέρακμος, καὶ οὕτως ὀφείλει γίνεσθαι, ὃ θέλει ποιεῖτω· οὐχ ἁμαρτάνει· γαμεῖτωσαν.

The δέ (but) here is a contrastive which links the content of what follows with the preceding verses. In this way, 7:36-38 may be an exception to the general preference for celibacy for the unmarried which Paul outlines in 7:32-35. Even as he recommends celibacy he specifies: οὐχ ἵνα βρόχον ὑμῖν ἐπιβάλω, ἀλλὰ πρὸς τὸ εὐσχημον καὶ εὐπάρεδρον τῷ κυρίῳ ἀπερισπᾶστως (i.e., not in order to drop a noose on you but for the sake of good order and for the sake of devotion to the Lord without distraction). The word in 7:36 meaning "to behave improperly" is undoubtedly linked to the word in 7:35 which means "good order" – ἀσχημονεῖν and εὐσχημον.⁴⁶ This strengthens the case for considering what follows in 7:36-38 as an exception to, or a further explanation of, Paul's position immediately prior in 7:32-35. Moreover, this linkage suggests that the "improper" behaviour of 7:36 is a threat to the good order of the community.

Two possibilities exist which may account for the description of the man's behaviour toward his betrothed as improper: 1) The man has betrothed a woman to himself and is therefore bound by the religious customs and laws which spell out his responsibilities towards her. More was at stake in this arrangement than simply the feelings and passions of the young couple. Financial arrangements for the upkeep of the woman and respect for the institutions of the community also hung in the balance. To renege on a promise of marriage could be an injustice not only to the woman, but also to her father who had the legal right to expect that the groom would assume the support of his daughter. The improper behaviour would thus be the failure to make good on a contractual promise made with the father-of-the-bride; clearly a potential threat to good order. 2) If ὑπέρακμος is interpreted as referring to the engaged man and his "strong passions,"⁴⁷ then the improper behaviour may be the lack of

⁴⁶ In *Mishnah Gittin* 4:1-5:9 fifteen rulings on divorce are made for the "good order of the world". Marriage laws and "good order" are two ideas linked in the Jewish legal tradition.

⁴⁷ W. Bauer / V. Reichmann / K. Aland / B. Aland, *Griechisch-deutsches Wörterbuch zu den Schriften des Neuen Testaments und frühchristlichen Literatur* (Berlin

self-restraint in sexual matters before the wedding had actually taken place. Given the link between the "good order" of 7:35 and the "improper" behaviour of 7:36, the explanation which sees the dissolution or the indefinite suspension of a marriage contract as a threat to good social order seems the most likely possibility here. Moreover, if the improper behaviour amounted to these young couples giving in to their passions, why did Paul not express this idea in simple terms. Just a few verses earlier he found no need to resort to peculiar vocabulary to get that very message across. In 1 Cor 7:9 we read, "For it is better to marry than to be aflame with passion."

Νομίζει ἐὰν ᾗ ὑπέρακμος: The phrase "if he considers" combines with "as he wishes" later in the verse to give an impression of a great deal of freedom on the part of the man in this decision-making process. Νομίζει should be translated with the preceding phrase and rendered thus: "If he thinks he is behaving improperly towards his betrothed..."

ὑπέρακμος: Ἄκμη refers to the highest point or prime of a person's development; its prefix, when used in compounds, means: beyond, exceedingly, fully developed. When the stem is applied to a virgin, a παρθένος, it often refers specifically to her youthful bloom.⁴⁸ In the Greek setting, Plato speaks of the high point for a man as being age thirty and for a woman as being aged twenty.⁴⁹ Since 7:36 does not make it clear whether ὑπέρακμος refers to the man or the virgin, the possibility also exists that the prefix ὑπερ is not to be understood in a temporal sense, but expresses intensification and thus could be interpreted to refer to the "strong passions" of the male.⁵⁰ This word is not found anywhere else in Greek.⁵¹ While the possibility exists that this word refers to the man, "τὴν παρθένον" is more likely its referent, as the latter lies syntactically closest to ὑπέρακμος.

In light of our research on Jewish marriage and betrothal practices, ὑπέρακμος may be translated here as "beyond marriageable age." Under

Walter de Gruyter, ⁶1988) 1674 (hereafter, WzNT). Cf. NRSV.

⁴⁸ WzNT, 1674.

⁴⁹ A. Robertson / A. Plummer, *1 Corinthians* (ICC; New York, Scribners, 1911) 159. As we have noted, the youthful bloom came much earlier in Jewish culture.

⁵⁰ WzNT, 1674.

⁵¹ H. G. Lidell / R. Scott, *A Greek-English Lexicon* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, ⁹1940, reprinted 1992) 1859.

the laws governing Jewish marriage, the girl would have been older than 12 1/2 years, and was in all likelihood, older than 13 1/2 years. If the text is referring specifically, as is our contention, to the time when the girl should have been transferred to the groom's home (i.e., one year after the betrothal) ὑπέρακμος is probably suggesting that more than the usual time had elapsed since the engagement, and that the bride and groom should have already celebrated the wedding. The delay is seen as improper. Since only the groom is empowered to act in such circumstances under Jewish custom, the impropriety rests squarely on the shoulders of the groom.

In coining the word ὑπέρακμος, Paul is, in all likelihood, attempting to translate one aspect of the rather complicated marriage customs observed by Jews into Greek. That no direct equivalents exist in Greek is understandable since the practices surrounding marriage and divorce in the two cultural communities were quite different. As we shall see, I believe a similar explanation can be proposed for Paul's very unusual use of the verb γαμίζειν in 7:38.

Οὐχ ἁμαρτάνει: The belief has been raised in some quarters, that sexual intercourse, and therefore marriage, is sinful: 7:1 (It is good for a man not to touch a woman) combines with 7:28 (but if you marry you do not sin) and 7:36 (he does not sin), to create the strong impression that someone of influence among the Corinthians suggested that marriage with conjugal rights was sinful. This would be a radical claim for Paul to make, given the divinely ordained character of marriage in Judaism, witnessed in the accounts of its origins in Gen 1:28 and 2:24-25. The possibility does exist, however, that Paul's own eschatological preference for celibacy has been misinterpreted.

Γαμείτωσαν, from γαμέω, means "let them marry," here with the sense "they ought to marry." This verb cannot possibly refer to the bride's father and is the first solid indication that a reading of the text as if it were addressed to that person is highly improbable.⁵²

7:37 ὃς δὲ ἔστηκεν ἐν τῇ καρδίᾳ αὐτοῦ ἑδραῖος, μὴ ἔχων ἀνάγκην, ἐξουσίαν δὲ ἔχει περὶ τοῦ ἰδίου θελήματος, καὶ τοῦτο κέκρικεν ἐν τῇ ἰδίᾳ καρδίᾳ, τηρεῖν τὴν ἑαυτοῦ παρθένον, καλῶς ποιήσει·

⁵² So Fee, 352.

The four first phrases of this verse, all place great emphasis on the freedom of the man in question. This emphasis further helps the reader identify the groom as the addressee of 7:36-38⁵³. If, as G. Fee contends, the same topic is addressed throughout 7:25-40, and the same man is being addressed in 7:36-38, it is highly unlikely that it is the bride's father.

Τηρεῖν τὴν ἑαυτοῦ παρθένον, καλῶς ποιήσει: The first section of this phrase translates literally "to keep his own virgin." For her to be called "his own virgin," the couple must be engaged already, which (as we saw above) in Jewish circles would have meant that the man already held certain rights over his bride-to-be. Moreover, Paul's fluctuation between the word γυνή (woman, wife) in 7:27 and παρθένος (virgin) 7:36, 37, 38 when referring to women to whom unmarried men are bound is perfectly understandable in the context of a betrothal which already carried with it a real bond of marriage.

Καλῶς ποιήσει: The future tense of this verb stands in clear contrast to the present tense of καλῶς ποιεῖ and suggests an ongoing character to the commitment taken on by the one who resolves not to marry. Pötscher, while he does not address this question directly states:

Wer seiner Jungfrau, seinem Mädchen, nicht auf die Dauer keusch gegenüber treten zu können glaubt... der soll sie heiraten... er sündigt nicht... Wer aber in seinem Inneren gefestigt und Herr seiner sexuellen Wünsche ist, wer also seiner Jungfrau bewahren kann, der handelt gut.⁵⁴

Pötscher, like the translators of the NRSV, misses the possibility that the improper behaviour of the man toward his betrothed in 7:36 may be the refusal to take up the responsibilities incumbent upon him.

7:38 ὥστε καὶ ὁ γαμίζων τὴν ἑαυτοῦ παρθένον καλῶς ποιεῖ, καὶ ὁ μὴ γαμίζων κρεῖσσον ποιήσει.

Here the parallel construction of καὶ... καὶ, both... and, shows Paul's approval of both options discussed earlier. To marry one's betrothed, to do her justice, is a good thing. To decide to put off the wedding, in light of the present distress, (7:26) is even better. In the expression, "If he

⁵³ W. Pötscher, "Die Wortbedeutung von γαμίζειν (I Kor. 7,38)": *Würzburger Jahrbuch für Altertum* (1979) 99-103, 99.

⁵⁴ Pötscher, 102.

thinks", (7:36) the discretion to act seems left entirely to the man, as one might expect under Jewish custom.

III. ON THE PROBLEM OF *γαμίζων*

The dilemma in 1 Cor 7:38 consists in the fact that the usual meaning of *γαμίζων*, "to give in marriage," does not fit this context. One expects to find a form of the verb *γαμεῖν*, "to marry," at that point in the text where a form of *γαμίζειν* appears. If, as we have seen, the passage cannot plausibly be addressed to the father-of-the-bride, why does Paul use a verb which normally refers to the father's act of giving his daughter in marriage?

With an eye to solving this problem, W. Pötscher undertook a study of NT verbs which fluctuate between *-ίζω* and *-εω* forms. Without reviewing the several examples Pötscher gives, we may say that he agrees with earlier research in concluding that *-εω* verb forms refer to the outcome of an action, while *-ίζω* verb forms refer to the process in which the outcome is brought about. He uses examples from the work of Kümmel and Frisk to support his evaluation.⁵⁵ The nuance evoked may be illustrated as the distinction between the notions of "choosing" (e.g., choosing a candidate) and "choice" (e.g., the candidate selected). In our case the distinction would likely consist in that between the celebration of the wedding and the resultant state of being married. Pötscher rightly rejects Kümmel's conclusion that NT verbs in *-εω* and *-ίζω* are interchangeable.⁵⁶ If Paul uses *γαμίζειν* in verse 38, some nuance in meaning must have been intended, or else he could have simply used *γαμεῖν* as readers from the time of the Church Fathers have consistently expected to find there.

The word *γαμίζειν* appears in only three contexts: the Gospels, 1 Cor 7:38 and in Apollonius Dyscolus. Apollonius Dyscolus refers to *γαμίζειν* in a discussion of transitive and intransitive verbs and limits *γαμίζειν* to intransitive uses.⁵⁷ Its uses in Mark 12:25 and Luke 17:27 throw no

⁵⁵ Pötscher, 100.

⁵⁶ Cf. Kümmel, 288.

⁵⁷ Apollonius Dyscolus, *de Syntaxi*, 3.153 p. 400, Uhlig: "ἔστι γὰρ τὸ μὲν προτέον (i. e., γαμῶ) γαμοῦ μεταλαμβάνω, τὸ δὲ γαμίζω γάμου τινὶ μεταδίδωμι".

light on whether it can mean both "to get married" and "to give in marriage," since it is always an act performed by someone else, whether the groom or the bride's father. Matt 24:38 is, however, a different case. There we read *γαμοῦντες καὶ γαμίζοντες*. In this case (Matt 24:38) the only translation possible is "marrying" and "giving in marriage." In this instance *γαμίζοντες* cannot refer to the groom, as *γαμοῦντες* refers to the groom immediately before this in the sentence. Likewise, *γαμίζοντες* cannot refer to the bride, since if that were the case it should be in the feminine form, *γαμίζουσαι*. The only person to whom the verb can refer in this instance, is the bride's father (or his representative) who offers his daughter in marriage, as is the Christian custom to this day. Thus in Matt 24:38, *γαμίζοντες* must refer to the action of the bride's father. This instance offers a concrete independent example (contra Kümmel) which supports the limitation on the word's meaning found in Apollonius Dyscolus.

Lietzmann and Kümmel have tried to get around this difficulty in the text by discrediting Apollonius as a reliable source for grammar rules.⁵⁸ His rules do not always fit with usage, they contend. Even if Apollonius's grammatical theories prove incorrect, his examples may very well still be valid. Against the learned arguments of Lietzmann and Kümmel stands the fact that in Matt 24:38, *γαμίζειν* does not refer to "marrying" but to "being given in marriage."

One problem remains, however, with Pötscher's insistence on the intransitive character of *γαμίζειν*, namely, that in the context of 7:38, a direct object is supplied for this supposedly intransitive verb: *ὁ γαμίζων τὴν ἑαυτοῦ παρθένον*. Even if Pötscher has proven his point that evidence supporting Apollonius Dyscolus's limitation on the *-ίζω* form of this verb can be adduced from the Gospels, its syntactical disposition in this sentence seems to indicate a transitive sense. Although this verb, as used in 7:38, is syntactically⁵⁹ the virtual equivalent of *γαμεῖν*, lexically, a nuance in the meaning, which has been noted by grammarians, can and should be applied here. This nuance fits perfectly with the context of

⁵⁸ H. Lietzmann, *An die Korinther I/II, Handbuch zum Neuen Testament 9*, expanded by W. G. Kümmel (Tübingen, J. C. B. Mohr, ³1969) 35.

⁵⁹ Grammatically, *γαμίζειν* is used here in the same way in which *γαμεῖν* was used, i.e., with a direct object in the accusative case.

Paul's remarks in 7:38, if Paul is referring to the two-step marriage practice, typical in Jewish circles.

Lietzmann cites A. Debrunner who brings to light a group of verbs ending in -ίζω (παννυχιζω among others) which can mean "to celebrate a feast" of some kind.⁶⁰ Following this lead, Lietzmann quite plausibly contends that γαμίζειν can mean "to celebrate the wedding."⁶¹ Relying on the research of Debrunner and Lietzmann, Pötscher believes that γαμίζειν in 7:38 does indeed refer to the "wedding," but that this reference to the wedding carries with it a most peculiar nuance. For Pötscher, the actual festive celebration itself does not seem to be the central issue in 7:38, but rather what the celebration would signify for the engaged couples. We contend (contra Pötscher) that it is precisely the festive celebration itself which is the central issue in 7:38. After having established the fact that γαμίζειν could refer to the celebration of the wedding, Pötscher seeks a further, if superfluous, clarification of the word-meaning.

Pötscher contends that γαμίζειν refers here to a form of marriage which maintains an inner distance, i.e., the γαμίζων quite properly marries his παρθένος in the context of a feast (premised on the possibility of a marriage with sexual relations) but still with that distance, which prevents his becoming enslaved to a physical bond.

Viel wichtiger aber: Bestätigung unserer Deutung von γαμίζειν als Ausdruck einer innerlich distanzierter Form des γαμεῖν ergibt sich vor allem aus der Bemerkung des Autors im selben Kapitel, in dem unser γαμίζειν zu finden ist: ἔχοντες γυναῖκας ὡς μὴ ἔχοντες ὄσιν...⁶²

Pötscher describes a common bond between the bride's father and the groom. He reads into Paul's use of this unusual verb form, very precise advice to perspective grooms. They should share the dispassionate attitude of the bride's father. The father's detached demeanour towards both the wedding and the resultant married status of his daughter, should serve as a model for the Christian husband's detached demeanour. What separates the two of course, (reminds Pötscher) is that the groom will live in a marriage relationship with the daughter.

⁶⁰ Lietzmann, 36.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

⁶² Pötscher, 101.

In view of the foregoing, Pötscher proposes the meaning of *γαμίζειν* in 7:38 to be "to make a wife of." No new basic meaning needs to be attributed to *γαμίζειν* and the groom can be understood as the referent for *ὁ γαμίζων* and *ὁ μὴ γαμίζων*, as the context demands. The word *γαμίζειν* is used in its root meaning with a case specific emphasis as it is applied in the concrete situation.

A three-tiered evaluation of possible behaviours results from this reading: (1) Anyone who is incapable of remaining chaste *vis-à-vis* his betrothed is better to marry so as to avoid sin; (2) Anyone who marries, maintaining an inner distance from the life of passions and thus from his virgin does well; (3) To this last case is added the man who, by a complete inner control, undertakes complete abstinence. Thus Pötscher understands the sentence: "He will do better."

But is this intricate explanation warranted? Pötscher's philological study, in determining a pattern in the meanings of those verbs which shift between *-ίζω* and *-εω* forms in the New Testament, adds a new dimension to our understanding of 7:36-38. In showing that the verb *γαμίζειν* could refer to the celebration of the wedding itself, as distinct from a focus on the resultant marriage, Pötscher has satisfied the needs of the context, as well as the exigencies of his word study. In this passage, Paul would then be saying to the engaged: those couples who have already gone through the first stage in the marriage process, i.e., the betrothal of the young woman to the man, may go ahead and celebrate the wedding; they are doing the right thing. Those who do not celebrate the wedding, "in view of the impending crisis" will do even better (7:26).

Pötscher, however, does not stop there. He mistakenly pushes his analysis to unnecessary lengths — his suppositions becoming ever more tenuous with each step added. In trying to draw parallels between the bride's father and the groom, his argument becomes implausible. With regard to Paul's teaching about marriage, the general context supports a view of inner detachment in marriage. But to argue that this very context-specific sense of *γαμίζειν* could be deciphered by Paul's readers in the ancient world is philological folly.

Within the article, after Pötscher brings a convincing argument forward in support of an interpretation of *γαμίζειν* as "celebrating the wedding," he quickly and without warrant concludes that this definition does not fit the context. He ignores the very research which allowed him to challenge Kümmel's contention that *-ίζω* and *-εω* verbs are interchangeable in New

Testament usage. Pötscher errs when he dismisses the possibility that the -ιζω form could indeed refer to the wedding. In part, this oversight may be explained by the fact that Pötscher mistakenly characterizes the improper behaviour as sexual misconduct, when the more likely possibility is that the failure to take up the responsibilities of marriage, taken on at the betrothal, is more likely in view. If following through on a betrothal, by celebrating the wedding, taking the bride into the groom's home and assuming the duties and rights of a husband is what is threatening the good order of the community, the celebration of the wedding would be the precise remedy to the problem (ἀσχημονεῖν ἐπὶ τὴν παρθένον). In other words, it would remove the threat to "good order" (τὸ εὖσχημον). If sexual misconduct is the problem, then one's attention is drawn not to the wedding feast, but to the resultant state of being married. By misreading "improper behaviour," Pötscher misses the significance of the fine distinction Lietzmann uncovered. This early *faux pas* brought his conclusions far afield. In his zeal to nail down this somewhat ambiguous text, Pötscher mistakenly concludes that Paul is addressing three possible life options for engaged couples at Corinth.

The Structure of 1 Cor 7:36-38

Following Fee's suggestion, we propose the following structure for 7:36:⁶³

- 1) Protasis #1: If anyone thinks he is behaving improperly towards his betrothed.
- 2) Protasis #2: and if she is getting beyond marriageable age and thus it should be.
- 3) Apodosis: let him do as he wishes.
- 4) Explanatory addition: He is not sinning, let them marry.

The structure of 7:36 suggests two things: (1) marriage is a remedy for possible improper behaviour, (2) anyone who suggests that marriage (with sexual intercourse) is sinful, is wrong. Whatever the source of such a view, Paul discounts its validity here. While it is our contention that the improper behaviour of 7:36 has nothing to do with sexual passion, we concur with Fee that these verses are to be understood against the back-

⁶³ Fee, 350-351. Cf. NRSV.

drop of the suggestion that marriage with sexual intercourse was somehow sinful, cf. 7:1.

Regarding the syntax of 7:36-38 we may say the following:

Option A: Presents the case of the man who thinks he ought to marry since he feels that he is not doing right by his betrothed. Paul agrees that he should do so (7:36).

Option B: Presents the case of a man who, in a determined way, under no compulsion, exercises self-control in a reflected manner and chooses celibacy. (The possibility of even an extended spiritual betrothal might be allowed for here, given the wording: "keeping his own virgin".)

Paul's opinion: He who exercises Option A does well. (This affirms the goodness of marriage and opens a way to avoid that improper behaviour which is a threat to good order.) He who exercises Option B does even better. (Paul's preference for celibacy.)

CONCLUSIONS

The recipients of 1 Cor 7 live at the confluence of two cultures, influenced on the one hand by ideas prevalent in the dominant culture but governed by the marital laws of their religious minority. It is our contention that a minority religious community seeking to set itself apart from the mores of a dominant culture – "which had enticed them and led them astray to idols" (1 Cor 12:2) – would be unlikely to assimilate the cultural practices of that dominant community. It seems clear that Christians at Corinth observed Jewish marital customs and regulations.

The advice Paul gives throughout 1 Cor 7 was offered in the face of an impending crisis and as such was of a provisional and occasional character. Little in the way of Paul's general attitudes towards marriage can be deduced with certainty from such a passage. Paul addresses a single issue throughout the entire passage of 7:25-38, an issue introduced in 7:25 and concluded in 7:38. In 7:25-38, the case of the never-before-married is being considered, (as distinct from the case of the unmarried in 7:8). The fact that among the never-before-married there appear to be two categories – those bound to wives and those not yet bound – confirms our hypothesis that Jewish betrothal and marriage are in view. Some of the men have already betrothed a woman to themselves and are thus legally bound under Jewish law and custom. In 7:38, the inferential

conjunction indicates a recapitulation of Paul's position on the advisability of betrothed couples going ahead with the wedding, "in view of the impending crisis" (7:26) and because "the appointed time has grown short." (7:29) To those who would suggest that something is wrong with marriage in the full biological sense, Paul has already responded in 7:3-5. Without marriage, sinful ways of relieving passion may result, cf. 7:5 and 6:12-20. Paul implicitly warns of the dangers that await the man who dismisses the power the sex drive may exercise over him.

In 7:37, Paul considers the case of the man blessed with the gift of celibacy. If one really has the gift (as Paul himself does, see 7:7) then celibacy is the better option. His four conditional phrases, each with an emphasis on the man's ability to take on celibacy, stand as ample warning for perspective celibates.

It is unnecessary to posit the existence of a pneumatic sect at Corinth in order to explain 1 Cor 7: The possibility that the Paul's own position has been misinterpreted or that Paul is responding to influences in the community which originated in the Cynic-Stoic debates on marriage are both more likely scenarios than the "invention" of a pneumatic party.

The peculiarities in Paul's text are best explained with the hypothesis that the ancient Jewish practices and regulations surrounding betrothal and marriage are the setting for his comments.

1) Jewish marriage took place in two steps, betrothal and the taking of the bride to the groom's house after about a year. The betrothal, a legally binding contract, gave the man rights over the woman and duties towards her. She became *his* in a very real sense (see 7:36, 37, 38).

2) Under Jewish law, the entire marriage process lay in the hands of males, whether the father-of-the-bride or the groom. This explains why Paul, when dealing with the question of whether or not engaged couples should go ahead and celebrate the wedding in 7:25-38, addresses his comments exclusively to the prospective grooms. 1 Cor 7:10-11 confirms the Jewish context: We were able to established using independent sources the Jewish women, unlike their pagan counterparts, were legally prevented from initiating a divorce and could do no more than separate from their spouses. Paul's advice on divorce and separation to men and women in vv. 10-11 mirrors this Jewish cultural distinctiveness perfectly.

3) Paul is concerned to maintain good order (7:35). A clear threat to that good order (τὸ εὐσχημον) is the improper behaviour of the groom towards his betrothed (ἀσχημονεῖν). In 7:36 Paul clearly tells the be-

trothed that marriage is no sin (cf. 7:28), even for those who had not yet celebrated the wedding "when they were called." In the decision to celebrate or postpone the wedding, more was at stake than simply the passions and feelings of the young couple. The marriage contract was a means of ensuring the social welfare of women and as such held important financial and therefore, social implications. The young man who promised marriage took on real duties and obligations towards his betrothed. To renege on these duties or to put them off indefinitely could well lead to social disorder, especially if the father-of-the-bride were insistent that the wedding take place.

4) Paul's use of words that are rare (or even unique) in Greek can be explained by the fact that he is trying to translate into Greek, words concepts and practices which originated in Jewish culture and in a Jewish mind-set. Since exact equivalents for these culturally-bound ideas did not exist, Paul is forced to coin a word and use other words with very precise nuances of meaning.

5) Ὑπέρακμος refers to the girl who is getting beyond marriageable age: the normal timetable for celebrating the wedding after the betrothal has not been respected; things have not taken their normal course as provided for in Jewish regulations governing marriage. The age for betrothal and the time for the transfer of the bride to the groom's home were predictable because of the rules governing betrothal and marriage.

6) The fact that γαμίζειν can be used as a syntactical equivalent for γαμεῖν, with the important lexical nuance that the "celebration of the wedding" is in view, also fits with the hypothesis that certain couples had already been bound together legally by betrothal, with only the celebration of the feast and the transfer of the bride to the groom's home left to do; others had not. Thus we understand verse 7:27 to refer to two categories of the never-before-married.

In recognizing that γαμίζειν as a verb form may refer directly to the celebration of a wedding, the technical difficulty caused by its appearance in 1 Cor 7:38 is overcome. The meaning of the word emerges from the context in which it was used. If γαμίζειν refers to the celebration of the wedding, then Paul is directly addressing a question that the Corinthian community has put to him regarding those couples who find themselves in a kind of marital limbo. The couple is already bound by the legal restrictions of marriage to one another through betrothal but have not consummated the marriage through the normal second step, which is the

celebration of the wedding, the transfer of the bride to the groom's home, and the start of a normal married life with full conjugal rights. The question put to Paul is whether or not betrothed couples should marry and cohabit, since Paul has told all to stay as they were when they were called. Paul's answer is yes for some, no for others; and that each man (consistent with Jewish Law) should decide for himself. In light of these findings I propose the following translation for 7:36-38:

But if anyone thinks he is behaving improperly toward his betrothed (virgin) and if she is getting beyond marriageable age, and thus it should be, let him do as he wishes, let them marry, it is no sin. But if someone stands firm in his heart, being under no compulsion but having control of his desire, and has determined this in his heart, to continue with his betrothed in a state of virginity, he will do well. So that he who marries his betrothed⁶⁴ does well and he who does not celebrate the wedding will do even better.

⁶⁴ Here understood as "He who goes ahead with the wedding with his betrothed".