

Notes on the Greek New Testament
Day 223 – August 11th – 1 Corinthians 7:1-24

Works frequently referenced in these notes on 1 Corinthians

John Drane	<i>Paul</i> , Lion Publishing, Berkhamstead, 1976
Leon Morris	<i>The First Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians</i> , Tyndale New Testament Commentary, 2 nd Ed., IVP, Leicester, 1985
Anthony C Thistleton	<i>The First Epistle to the Corinthians</i> , The New International Greek Testament Commentary, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 2000

1 Corinthians 7:1ff

"The tone of 7:1-11:1 differs strikingly from that of 5:1-6:20" Thistleton. Paul now responds to a number of questions raised by the Corinthians, questions to which a clear black and white answer cannot be given. "The key point in this major block is Paul's pastoral sensitivity to grey areas of difficulty." One of the subjects concerning which the Corinthians had written to Paul was marriage (7:1-40).

Deming and others draw attention to the Stoic-Cynic debates concerning marriage which may have affected the Corinthians. In particular, Epictetus advocated marriage for the ordinary person but for the Cynic, devoted to philosophical reflection, it is best to remain single. The Cynic can marry only under special circumstances.

"... the situation must be borne in mind. There was a widespread admiration for ascetic practices, including celibacy. Some, at least, of the Corinthians shared in this. Paul makes every concession to this point of view. He agrees that celibacy is 'good' and he points to some of its advantages. But he regards marriage as normal." Morris
 Margaret Mitchell suggests that Paul is addressing the potential divisiveness of a two-tier morality in which the spiritual 'elite' claim a 'higher' lifestyle. Paul insists that holiness of life should embrace and be lived out within the context of normal social relations (cf. 1 Thess 4:3-5).

Verse 1

Περὶ δὲ ὧν ἐγράψατε, καλὸν ἀνθρώπων
 γυναικὸς μὴ ἅπτεσθαι·

γυνή, αἰκος f woman, wife
 ἅπτεσθαι Verb, pres mid infn ἅπτω light,
 ignite; midd. take hold of, touch

Thistleton argues that καλὸν ἀνθρώπων γυναικὸς μὴ ἅπτεσθαι is a statement by the Corinthians, which Paul now quotes at the beginning of his response. It is difficult to determine whether the question related to the beginnings of such a relationship – whether a person should get married – or to conduct within an existing relationship – abstinence from sexual relations within marriage.

Verse 2

διὰ δὲ τὰς πορνείας ἕκαστος τὴν ἑαυτοῦ
 γυναῖκα ἔχέτω, καὶ ἕκαστη τὸν ἴδιον ἄνδρα
 ἔχέτω.

Thistleton suggests that δε is adversative, 'On the contrary.' Paul expresses his *disagreement* with the proposition quoted in v.1.

πορνεία, ας f sexual immorality

'Rather, in the face of so much immorality...' (REB). Paul advocates a lifestyle in stark contrast with the general immorality of society, immorality which has infected the church.

ἕκαστος, η, ον each, every
 ἑαυτοῦ, ἑαυτῆ, ἑαυτον him/her/itself

ἔχέτω the present tense implies 'keep' as well as 'have'.

ἴδιος, α, ον one's own
 ἄνδρα Noun, acc s ἀνήρ, ἄνδρος m man,
 husband

"Against this background Paul advocates 'a full conjugal life' (Rosner) against the background of Gen 2:18 and the Decalogue." Thistleton

Verse 3

τῇ γυναικὶ ὁ ἀνὴρ τὴν ὀφειλὴν ἀποδίδτω,
 ὁμοίως δὲ καὶ ἡ γυνὴ τῷ ἀνδρί.

ὀφειλή, ης f debt, what is due

Applies to every aspect of the marital relationship.

ἀποδίδωμι give, pay, fulfil

"The present imperative, *render*, indicates the habitual duty" Morris.

"The present may imply that the ascetics were not in the majority at Corinth: the believers are to continue the established practice (rather than to return to it, as aorist would imply). On the other hand, the present may simply denote habitual practice." Thistleton

ὁμοίως likewise, in the same way

Note the emphasis on mutuality.

Verse 4

ἡ γυνὴ τοῦ ἰδίου σώματος οὐκ ἐξουσιάζει ἀλλὰ ὁ ἀνὴρ· ὁμοίως δὲ καὶ ὁ ἀνὴρ τοῦ ἰδίου σώματος οὐκ ἐξουσιάζει ἀλλὰ ἡ γυνή.

σωμα, τος n body

ἐξουσιάζω have power over

'The wife's body does not belong to her alone, but also to the husband...' (NIV)

Verse 5

μὴ ἀποστερεῖτε ἀλλήλους, εἰ μήτι 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.

ἀποστερεῶ defraud, rob, steal

ἀλλήλων, οἰς, οὖς one another

'... of marital dues/rights'. "Marital dues brings out what is implicit but not explicit in the Greek. Although the context makes it clear that physical intimacy is the primary issue, mutual support and companionship cannot be excluded." Thistleton

ἂν particle indicating contingency

"The concession for 'special circumstances' is expressed hesitantly as εἰ μήτι ἂν." Thistleton

συμφωνον, ου n mutual consent

καιρος, ου m time, season

σχολάζω spend time in, devote self to

A number of later MSS add 'fasting'

παλιν again, once more

πειράζω test, tempt

ἀκρασία, ας f lack of self-control

"If the καιρος in which the couple cease intimacy is too prolonged, Satan will cash in on it to transform a time of prayer into one of negative trials or harmful fantasy. When voluntary consent begins to degenerate into frustration and the boundaries of self-control begin to collapse into ἀκρασία, the whole experience becomes counterproductive: *the goal would be nullified if Satan went on putting you through trials beyond your self-control*. Paul speaks here more as a pastor and counsellor rather than as a Christian moralist." Thistleton

Verse 6

τοῦτο δὲ λέγω κατὰ συγγνώμην, οὐ κατ' ἐπιταγήν.

συγγνώμη, ης f concession

ἐπιταγή, ης f command, order, authority

Morris sees this as referring not just to v.5 but to verses 2-5. "Paul has laid down duties for all who are married, but he does not lay it down as a duty that all should be married."

"Witherington, Wolff, Schrage, and many others refer the concession to the clause at the end of v.5 only: the couple may abstain from intimacy for a specific time if both of them find this helpful, but this is purely their own decision, and Paul lays down no rule or command about this matter. This interpretation is entirely convincing (*pace* Winter) and leaves no apparent linguistic or exegetical difficulty. This explanation also coheres with Paul's affirmation of a full marriage relationship, against the Roman background in which marriages were often mere instruments of convenience, and could be annulled simply with the words *tuas res tibi habeto* ('take your things and go'). Against such a background, Weiss sees apostolic injunctions, which Witherington convincingly perceives as about mutuality and reciprocal dues. In *this* context, the concession applies only to the special circumstances of v.5b." Thistleton

Verse 7

θέλω δὲ πάντας ἀνθρώπους εἶναι ὡς καὶ ἐμαυτόν· ἀλλὰ ἕκαστος ἴδιον ἔχει χάρισμα ἐκ θεοῦ, ὁ μὲν οὕτως, ὁ δὲ οὕτως.

θέλω wish, will

εἶναι Verb, pres infin εἰμι

ἐμαυτου, ης reflexive pro. myself, my own

Many suggest that Paul may have been widowed.

"Deming perceives this expression of preference as 'diplomatic' support for, and self-identification with, those who raised the issue at Corinth 'enabling Paul to identify with the Corinthians and advise them. A similar manner of persuasion may be found elsewhere in Paul, namely 1 Cor 14... Paul expresses both his empathy and his reservations by stating in 14:5, "I want you all to speak in tongues – but *rather* that you may prophesy" (θέλω δε παντας ... μαλλον δε ...), and in 14:18-19, "I thank God that I speak in tongues more than you all, *but* ..." (Deming's italics)." Thistleton

ἕκαστος, η, ου see v.2

χάρισμα, τος n gift (from God)

"Each has *his proper gift from God*. The question of marriage cannot be decided by applying one law to all. Each must consider what is God's will for him. And marriage, just as much as celibacy, is a gift of God." Morris

Verse 8

Λέγω δὲ τοῖς ἀγάμοις καὶ ταῖς χήραις, καλὸν αὐτοῖς ἔαν μείνωσιν ὡς κἀγώ·

ἀγαμος, ου f & m unmarried, single

The masculine here is probably gender inclusive, though some (e.g. Fee) think that the reference is to widowers, complemented then by χηραις. Thistleton thinks this suggestion carries extra weight in light of the pressure on men and women to remarry speedily. He cites an article by Aline Rousselle to the effect that in Roman society "a widow was expected to remarry within a year, and a divorcee within six months."

Kistemaker, however, says, "the unmarried are a class of people that includes widowers and both men and women who are single, separated or divorced."

χηρα, ας f widow

ἔαν if, even if, though

μείνωσιν Verb, aor act subj, 3 pl μενω trans remain, stay

καγώ from καὶ ἐγώ and I, but I, I also

Verse 9

εἰ δὲ οὐκ ἐγκρατεύονται, γαμησάτωσαν, κρεῖττον γάρ ἐστιν γαμησαί ἢ πυροῦσθαι.

ἐγκρατεῦομαι exercise self-control

Thistleton suggests that the picture is of "a couple for whom mutual love has become so powerful that it becomes a distraction from 'everything for the sake of the gospel.'" He thinks that the phrase here means 'If they do not have power over their passions.'

γαμεω marry

κρεῖττον and κρεῖσσον adv. better

πυροῦσθαι Verb, pres midd/pass dep infin

πυροομαι burn, be inflamed with desire

"Paul does not regard the suppression of sexual desires as itself meritorious, as some later writers have held." Morris

Verse 10

Τοῖς δὲ γεγαμηκόσιν παραγγέλλω, οὐκ ἐγὼ ἀλλὰ ὁ κύριος, γυναῖκα ἀπὸ ἀνδρὸς μὴ χωρισθῆναι

γεγαμηκόσιν Verb, perf act ptc, 3 pl γαμεω

The perfect denotes the married state consequent upon the act of marrying. "The case envisaged is that of marriage where both partners are Christians." Morris

παραγγέλλω command, instruct
χωρίζω separate; pass. separate oneself, leave

Cf. Mk 10:11-12.

Verse 11

– ἔαν δὲ καὶ χωρισθῆ, μενέτω ἀγαμος ἢ τῷ ἀνδρὶ καταλλαγῆτω – καὶ ἄνδρα γυναῖκα μὴ ἀφιέναι.

μενω see v.8

ἀγαμος, ου f & m see v.8

καταλλαγῆτω Verb, aor pass imperat, 3 s

καταλασσω reconcile

ἀφιέναι Verb, pres act infin ἀφιμι leave, forsake, divorce.

Some have suggested that at Corinth there were those who wanted to pursue an ascetic marriage and who wanted to separate so as to avoid the temptation to intimacy. Whatever the situation, Paul is seeking to reinforce the distinctively Christian view of marriage against the background of permissive Roman society.

Verse 12

Τοῖς δὲ λοιποῖς λέγω ἐγώ, οὐχ ὁ κύριος· εἴ τις ἀδελφὸς γυναῖκα ἔχει ἄπιστον, καὶ αὕτη συνευδοκεῖ οἰκεῖν μετ' αὐτοῦ, μὴ ἀφιέτω αὐτήν·

λοιπος, η, ον rest, remaining

By 'the rest' Morris understands "those not bound by the ties of Christian marriage."

λέγω ἐγώ, οὐχ ὁ κύριος i.e. Paul is no longer citing direct sayings of Jesus. This does mean that he believes that what he says carries any lesser authority.

ἄπιστος, ον unfaithful, unbelieving

συνευδοκεω be willing, agree to

Implies mutual consent.

οικεω intrans live, dwell; trans live in

Verse 13

καὶ γυνὴ εἴ τις ἔχει ἄνδρα ἄπιστον, καὶ οὗτος συνευδοκεῖ οἰκεῖν μετ' αὐτῆς, μὴ ἀφιέτω τὸν ἄνδρα.

Verse 14

ἡγιασται γὰρ ὁ ἀνὴρ ὁ ἄπιστος ἐν τῇ γυναικί, καὶ ἡγιασται ἡ γυνὴ ἢ ἄπιστος ἐν τῷ ἀδελφῷ· ἐπεὶ ἄρα τὰ τέκνα ὑμῶν ἀκάθαρτά ἐστιν, νῦν δὲ ἅγια ἐστιν.

ἡγιασται Verb, perf pass indic, 3 s ἁγιαζω

sanctify, make holy

ἐπεὶ since, because, for

τεκνον, ου n child; pl descendants

ἀκαθαρτος, ον unclean

The nature of the 'holiness' of the unbelieving partner and of the children is unclear. Paedobaptists, such as Morris, argue that the child of a believing parent is to be regarded as a Christian until they reach the age of discretion. This is difficult to sustain since the same can hardly be applied to the unbelieving partner. Paul is answering questions from the Corinthians, so that his meaning, though obscure to us, was plain to them.

It is probably best to understand Paul's words against the background of the concern by some Corinthians to live 'holy' lives. Since they were Christians they should have no fellowship with non-Christians (cf. for instance, 6:12-20). What then of unbelieving spouse or children? Should they be put away for the sake of holiness? In affirming their holiness Paul is not saying that they too are Christians but that the Christian's relationship with them is acceptable to God – holy in the sense of sanctioned by God for the sake of the believing partner.

"The godliness of the one does more to 'sanctify' the marriage than the ungodliness of the other to make it unclean. Accordingly a believer can live with an unbeliever ['not in the contracting of marriages but in maintaining those already entered into'] with a clear conscience." Calvin

Thistleton says, "If the spouse falls under the influence of the Christian partner's faith, lifestyle, prayer, and living out of the gospel, how much more shall the children?" He believes 'holy' here to mean 'separate' and adds, "Even if only one parent is Christian the children will be marked by an element of shaping and 'difference' from a wholly pagan environment."

Verse 15

εἰ δὲ ὁ ἄπιστος χωρίζεται, χωρίζεσθω· οὐ δεδούλωται ὁ ἀδελφὸς ἢ ἡ ἀδελφὴ ἐν τοῖς τοιοῦτοις, ἐν δὲ εἰρήνῃ κέκληκεν ἡμᾶς ὁ θεός.

χωρίζεσθω Verb, pres pass imperat, 3 s
χωρίζω see v.10.

δεδούλωται Verb, perf pass indic, 3 s
δουλωῶ enslave, make (someone) a slave

"But does the referential denotation mean: not ... in slavery to remain with the former spouse, or not in bondage to the marriage tie which would prevent freedom to remarry?"

Thistleton.

FF Bruce considers that Paul defines abandonment in these verses as "a state of what amounted to widowhood." He adds: "Presumably remarriage would not be completely excluded for the believer."

τοιούτος, αὐτῆ, οὗτον correlative pronoun and adjective such, of such kind
εἰρήνη, ἡς f peace

Verse 16

τί γὰρ οἶδας, γύναι, εἰ τὸν ἄνδρα σώσεις; ἢ τί οἶδας, ἄνερ, εἰ τὴν γυναῖκα σώσεις;

σωζῶ save, rescue, heal
ἄνερ Noun, voc s ἄνηρ

"Exactly opposite conclusions have been drawn as to the force of this. Some feel that it means that marriage should be retained as long as possible in the hope of conversion... To others Paul's meaning is that marriage is not to be regarded simply as an instrument of evangelism. To cling to a marriage which the heathen is determined to end would lead to nothing but frustration and tension... On the whole the latter seems more likely to be right than the former." Morris

Verses 17-24

Thistleton entitles this section *Divine Calling or Improved Status?* He says that Paul's response to the concerns at Corinth establishes "the principle that *neither freedom in the new creation nor obedient response to the divine call can be compromised by the constraints of a person's circumstantial situation or status in everyday life.* A Christian does not have to seek 'the right situation' in order to enjoy Christian freedom or to serve God's call effectively."

Verse 17

Εἰ μὴ ἐκάστω ὡς ἐμέρισεν ὁ κύριος, ἕκαστον ὡς κέκληκεν ὁ θεός, οὕτως περιπατεῖτω· καὶ οὕτως ἐν ταῖς ἐκκλησίαις πάσαις διατάσσομαι.

The εἰ μὴ (literally, 'except') introduces a contrast with what precedes it. Paul has spoken previously of the Christian's freedom – pursuing what makes for peace. He now introduces a contrasting theme, the need to be content with the situation in which God has placed you.

ἐκάστος, ἡ, ον each, every
μερίζω divide, assign, apportion
περιπατεῶ walk, walk about, live

"The Pauline logic seems to be that the **call** of the gospel (in the primary sense) can subsume within it a transposition and sublation of earthly circumstances which make a situation capable of becoming one in which the *call to service* can become (or remain) operative."

Thistleton

ἐκκλησία, ας f congregation, church
διατάσσω command, give instructions

Paul is not treating the Corinthians as a special case or laying down for them what he does not lay down for others.

Verse 18

περιτετημημένος τις ἐκλήθη; μὴ ἐπισπάσθω· ἐν ἀκροβυστία κέκληταί τις; μὴ περιτεμνέσθω.

περιτετημημένος perf pass ptc, m nom s
 περιτεμνω circumcise
 ἐπισπασμαι remove marks of circumcision
 ἀκροβυστία, ας f uncircumcision, non-Jews
 κέκληται Verb, perf pass indic, 3 s καλεω

The new creation enables us to live renewed lives no matter what our situation. In general, the Christian does not have to seek to change their situation in order to be a 'better' Christian or to serve the Lord more fully.

Verse 19

ἡ περιτομή οὐδὲν ἐστίν, καὶ ἡ ἀκροβυστία οὐδὲν ἐστίν, ἀλλὰ τήρησις ἐντολῶν θεοῦ.

περιτομή, ης f circumcision, those circumcised, Jews
 οὐδὲν Adjective, n nom & acc s οὐδεις, οὐδεμα, οὐδεν no one, nothing

'Is neither here nor there'

ἀλλὰ 'but what matters is.'

τήρησις, εως f keeping, obeying
 ἐντολή, ης f command, order, instruction

Compare Gal. 5:6. What is important is faith which, marked by love for God, motivates a person to live in a manner pleasing to him.

Verse 20

ἕκαστος ἐν τῇ κλήσει ἧ ἐκλήθη ἐν ταύτῃ μενέτω.

ἕκαστος, η, ον see v.17
 κλησις, εως f call, calling
 μενω trans remain, stay, abide

"In this context Paul refers to the respective situations of being married, being celibate, being a widow or widower, being separated, being a Jew or a Gentile, and being a slave, freedperson, or freeborn." Thistleton

Verse 21

Δοῦλος ἐκλήθη; μὴ σοι μελέτω· ἀλλ' εἰ καὶ δύνασαι ἐλεύθερος γενέσθαι, μᾶλλον χρῆσαι.

μελει impersonal verb it is of concern, it matters; μη σοι μελετω let it not be of concern to you

μὴ σοι μελέτω 'let it not worry you,' or, in modern parlance, 'forget it.'

ἐλευθερος, α, ον free, free person
 μαλλον adv rather, instead

χρῆσαι Verb, aor mid dep imperat, 2 s
 χραιομαι use, make use of

Paul's words can be understood in one of two very different ways:

- i) εἰ καὶ δύνασαι ἐλεύθερος γενέσθαι is understood to mean, *if you can gain free status*, and μᾶλλον χρῆσαι as *use the opportunity [for freedom] instead* (so AV, RV, NIV);
- ii) εἰ καὶ δύνασαι is taken to mean, *even if a chance of freedom arises*, and μᾶλλον χρῆσαι as *rather, use your position as a slave i.e. for faithful Christian living* (so NRSV).

Thistleton takes a mediating position (so also Barrett), arguing that the first half of the phrase relates to hopes *for the future* and the second half to *how one should live now*. He translates it as, "Even if there is a possibility that you might come to be free, rather, start to make positive use of the present." He concludes, "Hope for freedom must not be a distraction; one can use positively one's present situation. But if, after putting it in perspective and 'waiting,' freedom comes, then that now becomes the situation to use. Paul does not bind his readers to remain in slavery; but neither does he want them unsettled by fantasizing about discipleship as a freedperson." I.e. the Christian is to live to Christ *now* rather than being enslaved to hopes of a change of situation.

Verse 22

ὁ γὰρ ἐν κυρίῳ κληθεὶς δοῦλος ἀπελεύθερος κυρίου ἐστίν· ὁμοίως ὁ ἐλεύθερος κληθεὶς δοῦλος ἐστίν Χριστοῦ.

κληθεὶς Verb, aor pass ptc, m nom s καλεω ἀπελευθερος, ου m freedman

Cf. Gal 4:31; 5:1.

"The slave's real status is not defined by current legal status, but neither is it defined as simply an improved individual condition: freedom. The slave's real status is determined by his or her placement in a different household entirely: the household of Christ. The slave is a freedperson of the Lord and shares in the benefit, status and obligations that relationship brings." Fee and Schrage

ὁμοίως likewise, in the same way

Verse 23

τιμῆς ἠγοράσθητε· μὴ γίνεσθε δοῦλοι ἀνθρώπων.

τιμή, ης f honour, respect, price
 ἠγοράσθητε Verb, aor pass indic, 2 pl
 ἀγοράζω buy, redeem

Cf. 6:20.

Thistleton argues that v 23a belongs with v.22. "The Christian belongs to Christ, not to himself or herself. This is status and honour, for the slave represents his or her Lord; and it is freedom, for the believer is placed thereby in the hands of the Lord for his care, his decisions, his directions, his responsibility."

V 23b – Winter suggests this is addressed to, "Christian free men willing to sell themselves into slavery for social and financial benefit." Thistleton comments, "Paul is concerned with both situations and attitude; the public world and personal stance. Believers are not to return to the bondage of an honour-shame culture where everything revolves round what status is achieved in human eyes. But with chs. 1-4, this is the 'wisdom' only of the world which is folly with God." (See also the extended note in Thistleton's commentary *ad loc* on *Slavery in the Graeco-Roman World of the First Century*)

Verse 24

ἕκαστος ἐν ᾧ ἐκλήθη, ἀδελφοί, ἐν τούτῳ μενέτω παρὰ θεῶ.

παρὰ preposition with dat with, in the presence of

"Conversion is not the signal for a man to leave his occupation (unless it is one plainly incompatible with Christianity) and seek some other. All of life is God's. We should serve God where we are until he calls us elsewhere." Morris