

First Corinthians 7: Paul's Neglected Treatise on Gender

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Introduction

One searches in vain for a focused study of 1 Corinthians 7:1–40 by an evangelical addressing Paul's extensive call for mutuality in marriage and singleness as it relates to the contemporary gender debate.¹ Instead, individual sections of this passage are referenced on occasion by both sides, usually in isolation from their larger context, and generally as peripheral to the debate.²

Evangelicals have wrongly neglected this text on many counts. First, Paul's words here are three times longer than any gender passage in his other letters—in fact, slightly longer than all of his other comments on the subject taken together.³ Second, he addresses no less than twelve related, yet distinct, issues regarding marriage and singleness—again, more than in any other text.⁴ Third, his rhetoric is explicitly, consistently, and intentionally gender inclusive—while at the same time reflecting a carefully balanced sense of mutuality.⁵ Fourth, written about the time of Galatians (A.D. 49–55), 1 Corinthians 7 applies to marriage Paul's declaration that race, class, and gender are irrelevant for both status in Christ (Gal. 3:28) and relationships in the church community (Gal. 3:3; 5:1, 7, 16, 25).

Thus, 1 Corinthians 7 should be considered a point of reference for later gender texts (1 Cor. 11, 14, Eph. 5, Col. 3, 1 Pet. 3, 1 Tim. 3, Titus 2) as a more comprehensive statement against which these should be interpreted. It is a collection of “seed ideas”⁶ leading to Paul's larger theology of gender. Though this chapter should not be used to nullify or diminish the clear teachings of other texts, it must be afforded its own voice in the evangelical dialogue.

Paul's twelve principles of mutuality

In response to an earlier letter from the Corinthian church, Paul writes to confront a distorted view of spirituality, marriage, and the end of the age.⁷ He advises his readers to remain as they were when called to Christ, because being single or married is irrelevant for personal spirituality and devotion to ministry.⁸ But, Paul also appends to this advice twelve marriage-related principles for practical living,⁹ by which it becomes clear that the occasion of his remarks is not fully the same as his purpose.

More specifically, it is Paul's way of framing these twelve principles that catches the eye of the careful reader. Here, he does not address men as “heads” of the Roman household (as he does in 1 Cor. 11:3 and Eph. 5:23). Nor does he only refer to believers in the generic masculine (e.g., 1 Cor. 7:24, 29,

and many other instances)—though both were common conventions of his day. Instead, his rhetoric is at the same time gender-specific and gender-inclusive. Such an emphasis on mutuality is striking given the general assumptions toward patriarchy in both the Greco-Roman and Jewish traditions at that time.

1. Fidelity in marriage

... each man should have sexual relations with his own wife and each woman with her own husband. (7:2b)¹⁰

Although sexual immorality is the stated occasion for Paul's first principle, he says more than is necessary to address this concern. With explicit and precisely mirrored language, he addresses the husband and wife individually. Though he later addresses male overseers alone regarding this matter (1 Tim. 3:2), his commitment to mutual fidelity in marriage remains the comprehensive principle.

By calling each man to be faithful to his own wife and each woman to her own husband, Paul condemns in principle a wide range of “unsanctioned sexual intercourse,”¹¹ such as fornication, adultery, homosexuality—and, by extension, polygamy.¹² Though men have more commonly perpetuated such behaviors throughout human history, Paul remains committed here to addressing men and women in a mutual way.

2. Spousal rights

The husband should fulfill his marital duty to his wife, and likewise the wife to her husband. (7:3)

Paul's concern with sexual immorality continues as he calls believers to offer to their spouses what is rightfully theirs: regular and voluntary sexual intimacy. They are to give generously, not depriving each other. The longer statement addresses the husband first,¹³ then comes a shorter statement to the wife—but the inclusive, compound conjunction “and likewise also” makes it clear that the same obligation evenhandedly applies to both.

More importantly, the main verb is literally “to give up or yield.” Regarding the most intimate rights in marriage, the emphasis is not on exercising or asserting those rights. In this case, the husband—the one with greater power and status—is called upon first to yield by giving what rightfully belongs to his wife. Then, to be complete, the wife is told the same obligation applies to her. Such mutuality regarding “marriage rights” is remarkable in a predominantly patriarchal world. And, by extension, it seems reasonable to apply this principle to other aspects of marriage.

3. Yielding authority

The wife does not have authority over her own body but yields it to her husband. In the same way, the husband does not have authority over his own body but yields it to his wife. (7:4)

Much debate has occurred in the last few decades regarding the notion of male authority over women in the society, church,



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and home¹⁴—even including a proposed model of permanent “authority/subordination” within the Trinity that human “male authority” supposedly is meant to reflect.¹⁵ In this context, it is imperative to realize that 1 Corinthians 7:4 is the only biblical text that clearly and explicitly addresses the question of authority in marriage—and here it is clearly mutual.¹⁶ Paul first balances personal rights with a model of giving what is due the recipient: sexual intimacy (v. 3). Then, he broadens this call to include the principle of yielding the presumed “authority” of “marriage partner” rather than exercising it (v. 4). Like his call for fidelity in verse 2, the dual commands here are set in explicitly mirrored language. By doing so, Paul goes out of his way to be gender inclusive.

The uniqueness, content, and tone of this verse make it more important in the gender debate than most have been inclined to acknowledge. Paul’s point is that neither spouse should claim authority over his or her own body. Instead, each should yield that authority to the other. This is the way of servanthood modeled by Jesus, who enjoys equal power and authority within the Triune Godhead, yet chooses the path of sacrificial service (Matt. 23:8–12, Phil. 2:5–8). In the same way, Paul calls for mutual yielding of authority among human beings—especially Christian marriage partners. One might say that he stands the traditional notion of male headship on its head (as he is inclined to do elsewhere; cf. 1 Cor. 11 and Eph. 5). Just as Jesus chooses to yield his rights, so both men and women should do the same.

Such a radical call to yield authority in marital intimacy should serve as a paradigm for yielding authority in other areas of marriage. In fact, the very notion of a husband exercising authority over his wife runs counter to the force of this statement. But, many still reject this idea based on two texts where the metaphorical use of “head” (*kephalē*) appears regarding husbands.

First, Paul uses the same noun for authority (*exousia*) in 1 Corinthians 11:10, where he declares, “a woman ought to have authority over her own head” while praying or prophesying. However, it is not clear there whether he is referring to the abstract idea of authority (the woman choosing how she might cover her head) or a tangible symbol of authority (some kind of head covering). Nor is it clear whether the woman’s authority should be over her literal head (topmost part of her body) or over her figurative head (her husband, who is called her “head” in 11:2). In addition, the term translated “head” can denote “authority over,” but also can carry the ideas of “topmost, preeminence, point of origin, or source of provision.”¹⁷ In contrast to this maze of interpretive difficulties, the command to yield authority over one’s body in 1 Corinthians 7:4 is relatively simple and straightforward. Such clarity should help us to avoid the mistake of reading the unbiblical notion of the husband’s authority over his wife into other texts.

Second, though he does not explicitly mention “authority” in Ephesians 5, Paul tells the wife to “submit herself” to her husband (who was culturally the “head” of the Roman household) as part of his principle of “submitting to one another” in the church (Eph. 5:21–22, 24). Though “headship” in the head/body metaphor can connote “authority over” or “source of provision” in the larger context of Ephesians (1:20–23, 4:15–16),¹⁸ Paul only reinforces the

idea of “source of provision” for husbands to wives. Moreover, he calls husbands to sacrifice lovingly for their wives as Christ did for the church (5:25–30)—again, standing “headship” on its “head.”¹⁹ Though head of his wife, the husband is commanded to love her, *not* to exercise authority over her.

In the end, 1 Corinthians 7:4 remains the only clear and explicit statement in Scripture about authority within marriage—and here both husband and wife are called to yield it to the other in the deeply personal context of marital intimacy. Again, as Paul’s earliest statement about marriage relations, this text should serve as a reference point for later texts—not to nullify those that are equally clear, but to help clarify those that are not.

4. Consent for abstinence

Do not deprive each other except perhaps by mutual consent and for a time, so that you may devote yourselves to prayer; but then come together again. . . . (7:5)

On occasion, personal devotion to extended times of fasting, study, and prayer can interfere with marital intimacy. When this happens, Paul insists that mutual consent be reached first with one’s spouse. Though his “one another” language²⁰ here is more concise than before, he once again emphasizes mutual yielding rather than the notion that either spouse should presume a leadership role. This undermines the dysfunctional behavior in many patriarchal marriages where the husband exercises authority over his wife who counters with more subtle forms of control like withholding sexual intimacy.

Taken together, 1 Corinthians 7:3–5 presents mutual partnership as a model for marriage relationships—one that includes, among other things, mutual consent in processing marital decisions. At the same time, it militates against the longstanding and culturally endorsed notion that Paul’s call for the wife to submit to her husband in Ephesians 5:22–24 somehow may be translated into the privilege or responsibility for a husband to exercise authority as head over his wife.²¹ Whereas Paul clearly calls for voluntary and mutual submission in marriage—including that of the wife—he nowhere instructs a husband to exercise authority over his wife, however benevolent.²²

5. Loss of a spouse through death

Now to the widowers²³ and the widows I say: It is good for them to stay unmarried, as I do.²⁴ But if they cannot control themselves, they should marry. . . . (7:8–9)

The terms for “widowed” men and women differ slightly, yet are virtually synonymous in this context—implying that the same principle of “remain as you were when called” applies to both. At the same time, the variance reveals a contrast in the persistent cultural reality for men and women who have lost spouses to death. The change for women has generally been much more dramatic throughout history, while that for men has been relatively minimal. However, though Paul certainly recognizes these differences, his advice is the same to both regardless of gender.

6. Initiating divorce with a believer

A wife must not separate from her husband. But if she does, she must remain unmarried or else be reconciled to her husband. And a husband must not divorce his wife. (7:10b–11)

Here, the wife is addressed first, more extensively, and with slightly different language. She should not “separate from” her husband, whereas he is not to “send away or divorce” his wife. Yet again, the variance may reflect the reality of Paul’s day: A man usually had greater power to bring about a divorce than a woman. But, the difference is not substantive, as evidenced by Paul’s inclusive use of the stronger term for divorce for both marriage partners in verses 12–13. In the end, the actions he prohibits, left unchecked with either spouse, could lead to the dissolution of her or his marriage.

In addition, Paul tells the wife that, if she leaves her husband, she must remain unmarried or else be reconciled. Yet, given the larger context of this chapter, the wife’s call to reconciliation should be understood to apply equally to the husband. Though Paul’s reason for addressing the wife first and more extensively is not clear, it continues to serve his apparent interests in constructing a balanced theology of gender. By doing so, Paul empowers the woman in the relationship as she is called to exercise her will in the matter. In contrast, there is no greater responsibility or burden directed to the man. Instead, in the most stressful of times, wives and husbands must share together the challenge of staying together.

7. Initiating divorce with an unbeliever

If any brother has a wife who is not a believer and she is willing to live with him, he must not divorce her. And if a woman has a husband who is not a believer and he is willing to live with her, she must not divorce him. (7:12–13)

Paul continues his emphasis on mutuality in sustaining and nurturing a marriage, though here he addresses the problem of existing marriages with unbelievers. Once again, his language of “brother” versus “woman/wife” varies slightly, yet the difference remains insignificant, as the woman being addressed is clearly a sister in Christ.

Scripture makes it clear that God opposes a believer marrying outside of the faith,²⁵ as well as initiating divorce with one’s spouse (1 Cor. 7:10–13)²⁶—though the latter is permitted in extreme circumstances.²⁷ With this larger backdrop in mind, Paul calls the believing spouse (husband or wife) to extend grace to the one who does not yet believe. Again, the decision is not presented as the primary responsibility of the husband, but that of the believer. This is similar to Paul’s principle that spiritually mature believers are to help restore those who have sinned (Gal. 6:1).

8. Sanctification of an unbelieving spouse

For the unbelieving husband has been sanctified through his wife, and the unbelieving wife has been sanctified through

her believing husband. Otherwise your children would be unclean, but as it is, they are holy.²⁸ (7:14)

It falls outside the scope of this article to speculate on all that Paul means by the “sanctification” of spouses and children.²⁹ At the very least, an unbelieving spouse remaining with a believer sets himself or herself aside (along with their children) for holy

purposes. That is to say, they remain under the sanctifying influence of the believing spouse—regardless of gender. Moreover, it is clear that to whatever extent one can be sanctified through one’s spouse, such sanctification is mutual.

Further, this text must be allowed to inform our interpretation of Paul’s instructions to husbands to love their wives “just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy . . .” (Eph. 5:25–27). Paul seems to imply that husbands can have a sanctifying influence on their wives. However, such gender-specific language should not be read as gender exclusive.³⁰ On the contrary, 1 Corinthians 7:14 makes it clear with explicit, gender-inclusive language that spiritual benefit to an unbelieving spouse can come from the wife to the husband as well. Keeping both texts in conversation can bring greater clarity to this aspect of the gender debate.

9. Responsibility when an unbelieving spouse leaves

But if the unbeliever leaves, let it be so. The brother or sister is not bound in such circumstances; God has called us to live in peace. (7:15)

Paul’s admonitions above regarding separation and divorce are now softened to words of grace as he addresses believing spouses in mixed marriages as “brothers” and “sisters.” Such gender-inclusive language also clarifies the broader range of meaning in the generic masculine “unbeliever” at the beginning of the verse.

Each of the eight principles discussed above has reflected the idea of mutual responsibility of a spouse *to* his or her partner, whereas this verse makes it clear that neither is responsible *for* the other. When an unbeliever chooses to leave, believers who have tried their best to keep the marriage together are under no further obligation, for “God has called us to live in peace.” This could mean the peace to remain within a mixed marriage³¹ or the peace to let go of the relationship.³² The context seems to suggest the latter.³³

10. Salvation of an unbelieving spouse

How do you know, wife, whether you will save your husband? Or, how do you know, husband, whether you will save your wife? (7:16)

Keeping in mind the principle of “responsible *to*, but not *for*,” Paul asks a rhetorical question with the same perfectly mirrored language of mutuality employed at the beginning of this chapter. In this way, he explores the possibility that the marital commitment of a believer (male or female) to an unbeliever might lead to that person’s salvation.

One last time, Paul addresses women shoulder to shoulder alongside men, making it clear that either may choose devotion to ministry instead of marriage.

Surely, the spiritual benefit one human being can give to another can only go so far. It certainly falls short of Christ's effective benefit to save and sanctify the church. Yet, this passage suggests that we can partner with Christ as we aid unbelievers in the salvation and sanctification processes. But, at the same time, Paul makes it clear that neither of these potential benefits is limited to a husband or wife based on gender. On the contrary, with his consistent and explicitly inclusive language, Paul insists that these are mutually beneficial influences that either Christian spouse may have toward a partner who does not yet believe.

11. *Change of status*

Because of the present crisis, I think that it is good for a man to remain as he is. Are you pledged to a woman? Do not seek to be released. Are you free from such a commitment? Do not look for a wife. But if you do marry, you have not sinned; and if a virgin marries, she has not sinned. (7:26–28a)³⁴

This section may be addressing those men and women who have never been married, those who are already engaged, or both.³⁵ Consistent with one of his recurring themes in this chapter, Paul admonishes believers not to make a radical change in status because of the coming of the end of the age. Whether a man or woman is single, engaged, or married is irrelevant for functioning as a productive member of the New Covenant community.

In contrast to the word order of Paul's statements above about initiating divorce, here he addresses the men first and more extensively. We cannot be sure if this reflects a greater concern for men than women on this matter. At the least it serves once more to contribute to the diverse picture of gender mutuality that Paul paints across these twelve principles.

12. *Devotion to ministry*

Those who marry will face many troubles in this life, and I want to spare you. . . . The unmarried man is concerned about the Lord's affairs—how he can please the Lord. . . . The unmarried woman or virgin is concerned about the Lord's affairs: Her aim is to be devoted to the Lord in both body and spirit. (7:28b, 32–34)

It is ironic—though not entirely surprising—that Paul ends his larger discussion of gender mutuality in marriage with a statement regarding singleness. He has woven the thread of his preference for celibate singleness throughout the chapter with the purpose of serving Christ more efficiently (vv. 1, 6–8, 26, 29–35, 38b).

But, our focus in this article has not been on marriage versus singleness (though equally an important topic). Rather, the issue at hand has been the remarkable, gender-inclusive way that Paul has gone about his task. His closing statements remind the reader that ministry priorities apply equally to both men and women, whether devotion to prayer that distracts from sexual intimacy (v. 5) or devotion to ministry that avoids the distractions of marriage altogether (v. 28).

One last time, Paul addresses women shoulder to shoulder alongside men, making it clear that either may choose devotion

to ministry instead of marriage. This runs contrary to the cultural tradition that a young woman should have as her goal in life to find a good husband who will lead and care for her. Whether it concerns the question of marriage or faithful service to Christ and the church, one of Paul's purposes in this chapter is to promote a Christian model of gender mutuality.

Conclusions

This exploratory survey of 1 Corinthians 7 is intended to begin a dialogue that will reframe the discussion of this important yet neglected text. Perhaps it will provide some fresh thinking toward a different approach to this passage in the context of the evangelical gender debate. Hopefully, a more extensive study of this chapter with a focus on its relevance for the gender debate will emerge in the near future. Until then, there are a few tentative conclusions that can be drawn.

First, both celibate singleness and faithful marriage have legitimate places in our churches. Paul's argument is: "If you're not ready to embrace a godly and mutual marriage relationship, perhaps you should stay single. And, if you're not ready to embrace godly celibate singleness, perhaps you should consider marriage. But remember, godly devotion to Christ is more important than either!"

Second, writing 1 Corinthians 7 around the same time as his letter to the Galatians, Paul's language of evenhanded gender mutuality contrasts sharply with what one might expect from a first-century writer. Yet, it "coheres with" the cryptic—though more famous—declaration in Galatians 3:28,³⁶ being most likely his first expansion on the new creation model of radical oneness in Christ. Though his words do not address every aspect of marriage, this twelve-point statement is the most comprehensive made on the subject in Scripture—and, as such, it deserves much more attention in the contemporary evangelical dialogue on gender.

Third, as an early point of reference, this text shines the positive light of gender-inclusive mutuality on other statements in later gender texts (1 Cor. 11, 14; Eph. 5; Col. 3; 1 Pet. 3; 1 Tim. 3; Titus 2). By doing so, it helps to clarify important issues in the gender debate—such as yielding of authority (otherwise referred to by Paul in Eph. 5:21 as "submitting to one another") and spiritual benefits (sanctification and salvation) that a believer may give to her or his spouse in marriage. First Corinthians 7 neither silences nor renders neutral the clear teachings of other texts, though it must be allowed to shed greater light on those that are not so clear.

Notes

1. This is aside from the significant efforts expended to reconstruct the theological and cultural backdrop of 1 Cor. 7 and to address its many exegetical challenges. See Anthony C. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2000), 484–87, 545–46, 566–67 for working bibliographies on these and other issues related to this text, but not discussed in this article.

2. Cp. the standard textbooks: Alvera Mickelsen, *Women, Authority, and the Bible* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 1986); John Piper and Wayne Grudem, eds., *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood* (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway, 1991); Robert L. Saucy and Judith K. TenElshof, eds., *Women and Men in Ministry* (Chicago, Ill.: Moody, 2001);

Ronald W. Pierce and Rebecca Merrill Groothuis, eds., *Discovering Biblical Equality* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 2005).

3. In the Greek text, 1 Cor. 7:1–40 includes approximately 687 words, in comparison to a combined total of 680 words in 1 Cor. 11:2–16 (227), Eph. 5:21–33 (196), 1 Tim. 2:8–15 (97), Titus 2:2–6 (52), Gal. 3:26–29 (53), 1 Cor. 14:34–35 (36), and Col. 3:18–19 (19).

4. Noted by Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1987), 270, 288, and Thiselton, *First Corinthians*, 515. Compare ten virtues and vices in Titus 2, two prescriptions in Eph. 5 and Col. 3, four admonitions in 1 Tim. 2, two issues addressed in 1 Cor. 11, two concerns in 1 Cor. 14, and the single principle of practicing Christian oneness in Gal. 3.

5. It is a kind of gender “symmetry” or “parallelism.” See Glen G. Scorgie, *The Journey Back to Eden: Restoring the Creator’s Design for Women and Men* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 2005), 120, 142–44. This is remarkable considering its cultural context. Paul always includes specific reference to both men and women, yet varies the sequence. Men are mentioned first seven times (2, 12–15, 17), women, four times (3–4, 10–11, 16), and “each other” language is used once (5).

6. William J. Webb, “A Redemptive Movement Hermeneutic,” in Pierce and Groothuis, *Discovering Biblical Equality*, 391.

7. Perhaps he is referring to Jesus’ words about being “like God’s angels in heaven” (Matt. 22:30); see Fee, *First Corinthians*, 12, 269, 290, 330.

8. Throughout 1 Cor. 7, Paul reveals his personal preference for singleness (1, 6–8, 32–35, 38b) to serve God more efficiently in a world that is passing away (26, 29–31). At the same time, he acknowledges that each believer has his/her own “gift from God” (7), which meant for some getting married to avoid immorality (2, 5, 9, 36).

9. This is not the “complete Pauline teaching concerning marriage” (Thiselton, *First Corinthians*, 493–95). However, all twelve issues relate either to marriage or singleness (Fee, *First Corinthians*, 270). Thus, the entire context might be viewed as a discussion about the question of marriage.

10. Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture quotations are taken from the Today’s New International Version (TNIV, International Bible Society, 2005).

11. Paul’s use of the middle voice here connotes an intimate marital relationship (*A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, rev. and ed. Fredrick William Danker; electronic version 1.3 [Chicago, Ill.: University of Chicago, 2001], 420).

12. The practice of a man having multiple wives (also known as polygyny) has been far more common across ancient and modern cultures—to say the least—than that of a woman having multiple husbands (polyandry). Moreover, in the Greco-Roman culture of Paul’s day, abuse of marital fidelity was rampant. Demosthenes, a Greek statesman and orator from Athens, summed it up this way: “Courtesans were for companionship, concubines to meet everyday sexual needs, and wives to tend the house and bear legitimate children” (cited by Alison Le Cornu in *The IVP Women’s Bible Commentary*, ed. Catherine Clark Kroeger and Mary J. Evans [Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 2002], 653).

13. The Greek word order in 1 Cor. 7:3 literally puts the wife first in both clauses, though in the first clause she is the object of the preposition, while the husband is the subject of the sentence. Perhaps Paul subtly puts the emphasis on the wives—even while addressing the husbands—because he was more concerned with their behavior in this particular church context.

14. See the renewed emphasis on an authority/subordination model in Russell Moore, “After Patriarchy, What?: Why Egalitarians are Winning the Gender Debate,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 49 (2006), 569–76.

15. See, for example, the opposing essays by Bruce Ware, “Equal in Essence, Distinct in Roles: Eternal Functional Authority and Submission among the Essentially Equal Divine Persons of the Godhead,” and Mil-

lard Erickson, “Eternal Subordination within the Trinity: An Analysis and Evaluation,” presented at the 2006 Annual Meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society (Washington, D.C.). In addition, the most extensive work from an egalitarian perspective can be found in two books by Kevin Giles: *The Trinity and Subordinationism: The Doctrine of God and the Contemporary Gender Debate* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 2002) and *Jesus and the Father: Modern Evangelicals Reinvent the Doctrine of the Trinity* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 2006).

16. Piper and Grudem’s only response is that 1 Cor. 7:4 does not “nullify the husband’s [alleged] responsibility for general leadership” (never mentioned in the Bible). They acknowledge the emphasis on mutuality in this passage, but then go on to qualify the principle by insisting that the husband as head should develop “the pattern of intimacy” for himself and his wife (Piper and Grudem, *Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*, 80). This passage nowhere suggests such a qualification.

17. Richard S. Cervin, “Does *Kephale* Mean ‘Source’ or ‘Authority Over’ in Greek Literature? A Rebuttal,” *Trinity Journal* 10 (1989), 85–112. See nn. 18–19.

18. Clinton E. Arnold, “Jesus Christ: ‘Head’ of the Church” in *Jesus of Nazareth: Lord and Christ: Essays on the Historical Jesus and New Testament Christology*, ed. J. B. Green and M. Turner (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1994), 346–66.

19. Michelle Lee-Barnewell is breaking new ground in her insightful chapter “Turning *Kephale* on Its Head: Paul’s Rhetoric of Reversal in Ephesians 5:21–33,” forthcoming in *Christian Origins and Classical Culture: Social and Literary Contexts for the New Testament* (ed. Stanley E. Porter and Andrew W. Pitts; Brill).

20. Though the exact phrases vary slightly, the same idea is expressed with regard to at least eighteen different applications of Paul’s essential principle of mutuality: unity, kindness, honor, humility, grace, strength, attitude, hospitality, accountability (Rom. 12:5, 10, 16; 14:13, 19; 15:5, 7, 14; 16:16), care (1 Cor. 12:25), service, help (Gal. 5:13, 6:2), patience, truth-telling, forgiveness, submission (Eph. 4:2, 25, 32; 5:21), love, and comfort (1 Thess. 3:12, 4:18). A Christian model of mutuality plays a significant role in Pauline theology.

21. So argues George W. Knight III, “Husbands and Wives as Analogues of Christ and the Church,” Piper and Grudem, *Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*, 170.

22. Contrary to those who argue that wives should be “ordered under” husbands in a “subordinate position,” while husbands are to exercise “authority over” their wives as benevolent “leaders and providers” (Robert Saucy and Clinton Arnold, “Woman and Man in Apostolic Teaching,” Saucy and TenElshof, *Women and Men in Ministry*, 117–19 and 133–38 respectively).

23. So the alternate TNIV translation; also see Thiselton’s argument (*First Corinthians*, 515–16). The variance between the generic term “unmarried men/widowers” (similar to “unmarried women/widows” in 7:34) and the more explicit term “widows” in 7:8 is not as great as it may seem. The context of this chapter, as well as the specific parallel in this verse, confirms the meaning “widowers” in v. 8a.

24. The phrase “as I do” may indicate that Paul is writing as a divorced (his wife may have left him at his conversion), or that he was widowed. Either way, he appears to have chosen to remain single for more effective service to Christ.

25. Instructive examples include Abraham’s search for a bride for Isaac (Gen. 24), Samson’s escapades with Philistine women (Judg. 13–16), Solomon’s pagan wives that turned his heart from Yahweh (1 Kgs. 11), the infamous Jezebel (1 Kgs. 16–2 Kgs. 9), and, especially, Paul’s prohibition against being “unequally yoked” (2 Cor. 6).

26. The Law of Moses prohibits divorce under certain circumstances (Deut. 22:19, 29), yet allows for a “certificate of divorce” in other cases (Deut. 24:1, 3). Later, Malachi asserts, “God hates divorce” (Mal. 2:16).

27. Ironically, Ezra actually insists that the post-exilic Jews send away their pagan wives from the Judean community (Ezra 9–10). Later,

Jesus grants exceptions for divorce in cases of “sexual immorality” (cp. the identical language in Matt. 19:9 with 1 Cor. 7:2). Jesus’ ruling indicates that Moses’ original exception was because of the “hardness of human hearts” (Matt. 19:7–8). Such exceptions may suggest the possibility of separation under other unusual circumstances, such as spousal abuse.

28. Again the “woman/wife” versus “brother” language appears, as it did in vv. 12–13. Yet, again, the difference is not significant for two reasons: (1) Paul is clearly equating the brother (7:14b) with the husband in the previous phrase (7:14a), and (2) the idea of a spouse who does not yet believe being “made holy” by the other spouse is applied mutually to both husband and wife.

29. In Paul’s writings, the terms usually carry “moral/ethical implications” and can even function as metaphors for salvation (1 Cor. 1:30, 6:11), though the force of the word is probably not that strong here (Fee, *First Corinthians*, 299–302).

30. Contrary to Talley, who argues for a benevolent-patriarchy model of sanctification in marriage based on implications drawn from Christ’s sanctification of the church in Eph. 5:25–27, yet without a single reference to the more explicit and gender-inclusive mention of sanctification in the context of marriage in 1 Cor. 7:14 (David L. Talley, “Gender

and Sanctification: From Creation to Transformation,” *Journal of Biblical Manhood and Womanhood* [Spring 2003], 6–16).

31. See Fee, *First Corinthians*, 304–5.

32. See Thiselton, *First Corinthians*, 537–40.

33. This is also consistent with Paul’s earlier exhortation (based on a gospel of grace) that believers should “stand firm in the liberty in which Christ has made [them] free” (Gal. 5:1, 13). And, it is reinforced by his later admonition, “If it is possible, as much as it is up to you, be at peace with everyone” (Rom. 12:18).

34. The “interactive significance” of race and slavery for the question of gender relations (mentioned above by Paul in 1 Cor. 7:17–24) is essential to the larger discussion of a biblical theology of gender. This is confirmed by the grouping of the three categories in Gal. 3:28. However, that significance is not addressed here because of the limitations of this article. For such a discussion, see Thiselton, *First Corinthians*, 545–65.

35. Again, see Thiselton’s discussion of the various options for the subjects of this section (*First Corinthians*, 565–71) and Fee’s (*First Corinthians*, 322–34). The argument of this article, however, does not depend on answering this question.

36. Thiselton, *First Corinthians*, 527.



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