

CONNUBIAL SEX AND THE AVOIDANCE OF Πορνεία: PAUL'S RHETORICAL ARGUMENT IN 1 CORINTHIANS 7:1-5

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Abstract

This paper employs socio-rhetorical interpretation in order to analyze Paul's argument in 1 Cor 7:1-5 regarding the role of connubial sex in Christian marriage. The paper shows that Paul engages in Christian wisdom discourse, introducing his argument in 1 Cor 7:1 with a maxim, probably drawn from a communication from the Corinthians themselves. He then creates an argument from the contrary to repudiate the maxim on the grounds of the requirements of Christian sexual morality in v. 2. The paper shows that Paul elaborates his argument in vv. 3-4 before constructing an argument allowing for a very specific and limited exception to his own rule regarding the necessity of connubial sex for Christians. Paul's argument is analyzed with the help of insights derived from ancient rhetoric as well as cultural information regarding sexual practices from Greco-Roman authors.

Keywords: Rhetoric, Argumentation, Enthymemes, Sexual Morality; 1 Corinthians 7:1-5

Introduction

Like so much of 1 Corinthians, chapter 7 has a unique position among the extant writings of Paul. It contains his most extensive discourse on the key issues of marriage, divorce, and celibacy, all of which had enormous importance for the stability of the household structures of the Christians who constituted the earliest Christian community at Corinth. The danger has always been to treat 1 Cor 7 as though it contained a theology of marriage, divorce, celibacy and related matters (see Brown 1988, 54), rather than to see it for what it actually is, a finely balanced piece of rhetoric in which Paul deals with a set of issues around marriage that threatened to disrupt the church community in Corinth if not resolved. At the heart of 1 Cor 7, like much of the rest of the letter, is the problem of the factionalism of the church at Corinth (Mitchell 1992, 121-125).

In this paper I propose to engage in socio-rhetorical analysis in order to contribute to our understanding of how Paul's uniquely Christian mode of discourse functions in 1 Cor 7. Because a full analysis of chapter 7 would go considerably beyond the spatial limits set for this study, I propose to concentrate on vv. 1-5 since these verses raise from Paul's perspective one of the key issues that lies at the heart of the tensions around marriage and celibacy that dominate 1 Cor 7. My approach will be to explore carefully the argumentative texture embedded in the discourse of 1 Cor 7:1-5,¹ in order to unlock its nature as a complex piece of Pauline rhetoric. In the process, it will become clear that the question of sexual relations, both of the licit and the illicit kind envisaged in 1 Cor 7:1-5 involve the sexual politics of the human body in marriage.

¹ For a discussion of the basic approach which I am taking in this paper see Robbins (1996b) and (2002).

Rhetography of 1 Corinthians 7

Socio-rhetorical interpretation recognizes that narrative texts create a word picture or rhetograph in the mind of the reader or auditor, but, as I have shown elsewhere (Wanamaker 2003a, 2003), non-narrative texts, such as those found in Paul's letters, may imply a narrative for the reader/hearer as well. This implied narrative then leads to the creation of a rhetograph for the reader/hearer. First Corinthians 7:1 invokes the image of a prior communication by the readers as Paul explicitly indicates that he is responding to something which they had written to him. The words, "It is good for a man not to touch a woman" (1 Cor 7:1b) are thought by some scholars to be a quote from the communication received by Paul since they constitute a position contrary to the one that he espouses in 1 Cor 7:2-5 (Deming 2004, 107-110). As we shall see, they probably constitute a maxim summarizing a key concern of the Corinthian Christians. First Corinthians 7:25 invokes the same image of intercommunication between the Corinthians and Paul through the repetition of the words "now concerning" (περὶ δὲ from v. 1. The fact that the Corinthians appear to have raised with Paul issues around the *topos* of marriage suggests that they sought from him some authoritative word of direction regarding their own practice.

Thus the overall rhetographic image created by 1 Cor 7 concerns a dialogical communication process between Paul and the Corinthians around topics well known to both parties. Paul's emphasis on his own self-authenticating opinions (1 Cor 7:6, 12, 17, 25, 40) indicates that the intercommunication is not between equals but reflects a hierarchy of authority in which Paul's views should direct the actions of the community.²

The more specific rhetographic image created by 1 Cor 7:1-5 is that of the household, and in particular the sexual relations between husbands and wives within households. The picture created is intended by Paul to correspond to the lived arrangements between husbands and wives in households within the Corinthian Christian community. But just as we are delicate about sexual relations, at least in polite company, and have developed a vocabulary of verbal euphemisms to describe what we mean, such as "sleeping together" and "making love," Paul uses a series of verbal euphemisms such as "touching," "having," "exercising authority" and "depriving" to describe conjugal sex within the household. The rhetograph also raises the image of dangerous or illicit sexual coupling (v. 2) that takes place outside the sanctioned sphere of marriage and invokes the *persona* of Satan, the tempter, as one who looks for ways to disrupt the ordered working of the Christian household where connubial sex is practiced (v. 5).

The Mode of Discourse

Socio-rhetorical analysis as developed by Robbins (1996b; 1996c; 2002) and others (e.g., Bloomquist 2002; Eriksson 2002; Wanamaker 2003a) has a strong interest in the rhetorical modes of early Christian discourse. Robbins (1996a) coined the term "rhetorlect" to describe a particular mode of discourse because he understands early Christian discourse to consist of a series of identifiable "rhetorical dialects" that interacted with one another in shaping the emerging Christian discourse. He (Robbins 1996a, 356) argues that a rhetorlect "is a form of language variety or discourse identifiable on the basis of a distinctive configuration of themes, topics, reasonings, and argumentations" He (Robbins 1996a, 356) goes on to say, "A [Christian] rhetorlect, then, contains certain major and

² The basis of Paul's authority over the community was already laid in 1 Cor 1-4, especially 4:14-21. See Wanamaker (2003b) and Burke (2003).

minor premises that provide theses about God and the world supported by rationales, clarified by contraries, and embellished by analogies, examples, and support from ancient tradition” Robbins (2002, 30) has identified six major rhetorolects in the writings of the New Testament: Wisdom, miracle, prophetic, suffering-death, apocalyptic, and pre-creation. These “rhetorical dialects” interact with one another, often interpenetrating one another in the various writings of early Christianity. Thus, for example, a wisdom mode of discourse may be intertwined with elements that derive from an apocalyptic mode of discourse.

Among the rhetorolects of early Christian discourse wisdom discourse deals especially with “human social relationships and well-being” around such topics as “parent/child, patron/client, host/guest, friendship, limited/goods, honour/shame, life/death” (Robbins 2002, 31). Behind human social relations stands God who is creator and sustainer of the world of humans and to whom humans relate as offspring. The major forms of argumentation in this discourse are “thesis, rationale, contrary, opposite, analogy, example, and authoritative judgment” according to Robbins (2002, 31-32).

In 1 Cor 7 we are clearly dealing with one of the most basic of human relationships, that of men and women as reproductive units at the level of sexual intercourse and also at the level of household units in which reproduction takes place, sustaining human society. In 1 Cor 7 the wisdom discourse is interpenetrated at times by reasonings and topics drawn from other Christian rhetorolects. For example, when Paul argues that men and women should remain single if they are able to exercise sexual self-control and those who are married should live as though they were not married, he does so on the basis of the “impending crisis” (v. 26) and the fact that the “appointed time has grown short” (v. 29), reasoning that is derived from apocalyptic discourse but is superimposed on wisdom discourse to justify the disruption of normal reproductive and household relations that are core relations in wisdom discourse.

1 Corinthians 7 and its Argumentative Context

Winter (2003b) has subjected 1 Corinthians to a careful statistical analysis concerning the different themes that are embedded throughout the letter. In concentrating on individual passages such as 1 Cor 7 we often miss the wider discourse patterns of the letter. Winter (2003b, 143-149) shows that issues around marriage, betrothal, sexual sins, and gender based concerns like veiling of women, take up nearly twenty percent of the entire letter. This strongly suggests that the marriage and betrothal discourse of chapter 7 must be seen against a much wider pattern in the discourse of the letter. Unfortunately I do not have time to pursue this wider discourse pattern in this paper, but what is immediately important is that while 1 Cor 7:1 suggests that Paul is turning to a new issue raised by the Corinthians, this is not altogether correct. A number of sexual issues that impact on marriage, households and human bodies are addressed in 1 Cor 5-6 and form the context of the argument in chapter 7. In the same way, the discussion in chapters 8 and 10 is not divorced from concerns about dangerous sexual situations as Winter (2003b, 145-146) shows. Thus, chapter 7 fits into a wider pattern of concern by Paul around illicit sex, sexual control, and the body. The discussion about marriage, including betrothal, in chapter 7 foregrounds for Paul’s auditors the only legitimate site for sexual intercourse for Christians, if they are to avoid the sins associated with various forms of πορνεία or illicit sex.

Like much in Paul’s letters the argument in 1 Cor 7 is part of what Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca (1969, 491) refer to as an evolving argumentative situation in which the

earlier interactions influence the “argumentative possibilities open to the speaker.” Thus the argumentative situation that has evolved with the Corinthian Christians influences the possible lines of argument open to Paul in chapter 7. An alternative argumentative situation would almost certainly have generated a different argument regarding marriage, betrothal, separation and divorce. For example, Paul has made the issue of sexual self-control and the fear of πορνεία central to his argument, both regarding sexual intercourse in marriage and with respect to whether unmarried Christians should marry. This development in his argumentation was very likely determined by the evolving argumentative situation with his Corinthians converts, but in a different rhetorical situation this might not have been his preferred approach.

The Argumentative Texture of 1 Corinthians 7:1-5

Within socio-rhetorical interpretation argumentation plays a key role in the process of analysis and interpretation of the inner texture of a text. In 1 Cor 7:1b Paul's statement, “It is morally virtuous (καλόν)³ for a man not to have sexual intercourse (ἄπτεσθαι)⁴ with a woman (γυναικός)”⁵ has the quality of a maxim, that is, a piece of popular moral wisdom. For contemporary scholars the reasoning behind the maxim has proved highly elusive as the plethora of views held by various scholars indicates (see Deming 2004, 1-46; Thiselton 2000, 487-493). Knowledge of maxims in antiquity, however, may help with the interpretation. According to Aristotle (*Rhetorica* 2.21.2) maxims are general assertions about actions to be chosen or rejected and constitute what Alexandre (1999, 50-51), calls “an elliptical and fragmentary form of the enthymeme.” The maxim normally functions as the premise or conclusion of the enthymeme but when the cause or reasons in support of the maxim are provided, the maxim and its support form an enthymeme in Aristotle's view. In the case of 1 Cor 7:1b the maxim is provided with a reason, albeit a very brief one, and therefore we may have an enthymeme in its own right.⁶ Using the “rule, case, result” approach to enthymemes adopted by Robbins (1998, 345-346) in his socio-rhetorical analysis of arguments, 1 Cor 7:1b may be presented as an enthymeme in the following way:

Rule, stated as a maxim:	“A man should not have sexual intercourse with a woman.”
Case, reason:	Sexual abstinence is “morally virtuous.”
Result (unstated):	A man who abstains from sexual intercourse with a woman (or his wife) is morally virtuous.

³ For this interpretation of the word καλόν, which the NRSV translates as “well,” see Garland (2003, 252–254).

⁴ The word ἄπτεσθαι, which means “to touch” or “to cleave,” is a well-known euphemism for sexual intercourse. See Fee (2003, 204–206).

⁵ The question of whether γυναικός refers here to a woman or a wife, and whether the situation envisioned concerns the beginning of a relationship leading to marriage, to marriage itself, or to any sexual relationship has proved a difficult one for interpreters (Thiselton 2000, 500). Winter (2001, 225–226) argues that γυναικός should be translated “his wife.” In the immediate context of 1 Cor 7:2–5 this interpretation makes good sense, but the maxim is potentially broader in its reference since it could apply to the situation described in 1 Cor 7:8–9 and 25–38 where it would have to refer to a woman and not simply to a wife. For this reason it is better to translate γυναικός as “woman” rather than “wife” in 1 Cor 7:1.

⁶ According to Quintilian (*Institutio oratoria* 5.10.2) a maxim with a reason in support of it is an enthymeme. (I owe this observation to Aune 2003, 150). Ramsaran (1996, 18), citing Aristotle's *Rhetorica* 2.21.2, maintains that maxims which have “their reasons stated as part of or embedded in the statement itself” are “enthymematic, but are not part of an enthymeme.” Clearly by the period of Quintilian in the late first century the understanding of the enthymeme had changed.

Paul's Corinthian auditors clearly understood why it was "morally virtuous" to abstain from sexual intercourse on the basis of their social and cultural knowledge, as well as their understanding of the rhetorical situation. The maxim, as it stands, reflects a male perspective since it is about men not having intercourse with women and perhaps specifically their wives, rather than the opposite, that is, women being morally virtuous for not having sex with men or their husbands. The maxim also contains a negative evaluation of sexual intercourse which was not at all uncommon in antiquity on philosophical (Deming 2004, 109-113), medical (Martin 1995, 200-208), and religious grounds (Oster 1992, 58-64). In the verses that follow Paul counters aspects of the cultural reasoning behind the maxim.

Paul's response to this cultural reasoning of at least some members in the community is to offer a piece of Christian wisdom reasoning about the sexual relationship between Christian husbands and wives in 1 Cor 7:2-5.

Having condemned illicit sex in all its forms in 1 Cor 6:12-20 as the obvious ethical consequence of being a follower of Christ, Paul could not simply refute the claim of the Corinthians' maxim by asserting its absolute contrary that "it is good for a man to have sex with a woman." Thus in 1 Cor 7:2 he creates a Christian wisdom driven rationale about sexual relations. This Christian wisdom has its roots in the wisdom tradition of Jewish culture which saw marriage as a prophylaxis⁷ against illicit intercourse (Prov 5:15-18; Tob 4:12; and *Testament of Levi* 9:9-10), thereby placing a high value on marriage (Collins 1999, 258; Yarbrough 1985, 69). The adversative force of the particle $\delta\acute{\epsilon}$ in 1 Cor 7:2 has been noted by scholars (Fee 1987, 277; Thiselton 2000, 501), and suggests that Paul intends the sentence to stand as a contrary to the maxim in 1 Cor 7:1b.

Aristotle (*Rhetorica* 2.23) lists what he considers to be the twenty-eight common *topoi* of enthymematic argumentation, and pride of place goes to contraries (2.23.1). Quintilian (*Institutio oratoria* 5.10.2 and 5.14.2) maintains that a majority of rhetoricians in his day believed that the argument by enthymeme was based on incompatibles or contraries. Eriksson (2002, 336-347), after a valuable discussion of arguments from the contrary, concludes that "contrary arguments are enthymemes" and that there are two types of contrary arguments: Constructive and destructive ones. "In the constructive argument the case supports the rule and the resulting conclusion therefore serves to establish the thesis. In the destructive argument from the contrary, the case contradicts the rule... The contradicted rule can be either a statement of the opponent or a more general principle" (Eriksson 2002, 347). While I have suggested that 1 Cor 7:1b may be thought of as an enthymematic argument in and of itself, though not Paul's own argument, 1 Cor 7:1b and 7:2 form Paul's own enthymematic argument from the contrary. This argument has the destructive intent of undermining the rule "it is morally good for a man not to have sexual intercourse with woman." The contraries in the two statements mutually exclude one another and are as follows: "A man should not have sexual intercourse with a woman" (1 Cor 7:1b) and "each man should have sexual intercourse ($\acute{\epsilon}\chi\acute{\epsilon}\tau\omega$ with his own wife and each woman should have sexual intercourse $\acute{\epsilon}\chi\acute{\epsilon}\tau\omega$ with her own husband" (1 Cor 7:2b).⁸ The second statement hints at a double contradiction: Not having sex and having sex, but also, active man and active woman in contrast to active man and passive woman (a typically Greek conception). In other words Paul contradicts the claim of the Corinthians by saying not only that men are sexual actors, but also that women are sexual actors.

⁷ Prophylaxis is a term used by Martin (1995, 209) in relation to a slightly different context.

⁸ On this translation of the imperative, $\acute{\epsilon}\chi\acute{\epsilon}\tau\omega$, see Garland (2003, 256).

As we have seen, the claim that a man should not have sexual congress with a woman is supported by a reason, namely, that abstinence is morally virtuous. Similarly 1 Cor 7:2 offers a reason for sexual relations between spouses, namely, the danger of illicit sex for those who try to practice abstinence and cannot control their bodily passions.⁹ The supporting reasons for both statements are thus similar since the reason for abstinence in 1 Cor 7:1b and the reason for connubial intercourse in 1 Cor 7:2 are both moral reasons. The reason for Christian marriage partners engaging in sex to avoid various forms of πορνεία, however, is far more serious than the morally virtuous act of abstinence envisaged in 1 Cor 7:1b. The avoidance of any form of πορνεία is a specifically Christian moral duty with serious consequences since people engaging in illicit sex will be excluded from inheriting the kingdom of God (1 Cor 6:9-11). Illicit sexual activity actually has profound implications for the Christian's relation with God as the believer's body is the temple of the Holy Spirit given by God (1 Cor 6:15-20). Any form of illicit sex is a sin against the body which is the temple of God's Holy Spirit (1 Cor 6:18-20). Thus the verses that immediately precede 1 Cor 7:1-5 create a powerful argument against sexual immorality through an appeal to its negative consequences on the dwelling place of God's Spirit, the body of the believer.

The reasoning of the enthymemic contrary argument contained in 1 Cor 7:1b-7:2 may be set out as follows:

- Rule: It is morally virtuous for a man not to have sexual intercourse with a woman (including his wife).
- Case: However, sexual abstinence in marriage may lead to πορνεία.
- Result: Each Christian man should have sexual relations with his own wife, and each Christian woman should have sexual relations with her own husband in order to avoid πορνεία that might result from conjugal abstinence.

The benefit of the moral good of abstinence in marriage is contradicted or as we might say, exceeded, by the much more significant Christian moral good of avoiding πορνεία through having an active sex life in marriage. Thus the contrary is really about the primary issue of advantage, and is therefore a qualitative argument, as Paul attempts to persuade the Corinthian Christians against the practice of sexual abstinence in marriage. This places the rhetoric of 1 Cor 7:1-5 in the deliberative genre (see Aristotle, *Rhetorica* 1.3.4-5).

The rhetorical literature of antiquity beginning with Aristotle's *Rhetorica* regularly discusses the use of amplification or elaboration. Aristotle claims that amplification is not an element of an enthymeme but contributes to showing that something has greater advantage when a decision is required about an action (*Rhetorica* 2.26.1). *Ad Herennium* 4.43.56 suggests that when discoursing on a theme, the theme can be amplified by expressing it in another form. This seems to describe very appropriately what Paul does in 1 Cor 7:3-4 since he restates what he has already said in 1 Cor 7:2 in different words. The asyndeton of these verses grammatically heightens the weight of the comments that they contain in supporting the result of the contrary argument in 1 Cor 7:2.

Within the socio-cultural milieu of the time, as we have suggested, sexual relations, whether licit or illicit, were thought to be problematic from a number of different perspectives, and therefore marriage did not guarantee regular sexual congress between a husband and a wife, though this was more a problem among members of the elite classes as

⁹ According to Winter (2001, 229-230) 1 Cor 6:9 suggests that "the sexual sins of fornication and adultery are not 'thought to have been given up' but must be abandoned" by some in Corinth.

the Cynic-Stoic debate on marriage suggests.¹⁰ Musonius Rufus, a first century Stoic philosopher, argued in “On Sexual Indulgence” that self-controlled and moral men should consider sexual intercourse “just and lawful” only when it occurred in marriage and for the purpose of procreation. Sex for pleasure, even in marriage, he considered to be unjust and unlawful since it showed a lack of self-restraint.¹¹ Paul’s counter argument to the maxim in 1 Cor 7:1b that marriage was important for men and women to prevent them engaging in illicit sexual congress implies that marriage is a place where sexual desires may legitimately be fulfilled, but it does not necessitate this actually happening in a culture where marriage without sexual intercourse, or at least very little of it, was in some circles deemed virtuous as we have seen. In response to this possibility Paul amplifies on the nature of the Christian marriage relationship with a further imperative, ἀποδιδότω. The instruction concerns the mutual obligation of men and women in marriage. Against those whose views are represented in the maxim in v. 1b, Paul maintains that men and women have an obligation to fulfill their connubial sexual duty to each other. In the culture of the first century Mediterranean world social obligations were binding and “had first priority in decisions relating to the conduct of first-century men and women” (Winter 2001, 130-131, 227). Thus Paul’s instruction in v. 3 to fulfill their marital obligations (ὀφειλή) had a mandatory quality that could not be lightly brushed aside by anyone accepting Paul’s authority. The need for his authority here in overcoming the socio-culturally mandated practice of sexual abstinence even in marriage is part of the reason why in 1 Cor 1-4 Paul goes to such extensive links to assert his unique authority over the community through the ideological move contained in his rhetoric (Wanamaker 2003b). Paul is not simply an apostle in relation to the Corinthians, he is also the *paterfamilias* of the community and its members (1 Cor 4:14-21) who takes responsibility for their instruction and behavior.

The logic of this elaboration of v. 2 is not only that it is not good that a husband should avoid coitus with his wife (the contrary of the maxim of v. 1b), but that husbands and wives as Christians have mutual obligations to one another to fulfill conjugal responsibilities. Chief among such connubial obligations are the sexual needs of their partner. Thus Paul adds a further amplification or elaboration in v. 4 to make clear precisely what marital obligation he is referring to and its implications. Husbands and wives do not have power or authority over their own bodies, but they are to exercise authority over their spouse’s body. That a married woman did not have authority or power over her own body sexually is not particularly surprising in first-century patriarchal culture. Plutarch, for example, makes clear that in sexual matters, as in virtually all other matters, the wife should be the passive partner accommodating herself to her husband (*Moralia* 138-146). But that a man did not have authority over his own body and must submit to the authority and will of his wife, as Paul maintains in v. 4, was unusual in first century culture (Winter 2001, 228).¹² But we should not lose sight of Paul’s reasoning on marital coitus. For Paul, the sexual submission of husbands to wives and wives to husbands means that normal sexual desire will not lead one or the other of the marital partners to engage in an act of πορνεία that would pollute

¹⁰ On the Cynic-Stoic debate regarding marriage see Deming (2004, 47–85).

¹¹ For the relevant quotation see Winter (2001, 229).

¹² Before assuming that Paul teaches a genuine equality between marriage partners, the warning of McNamara (1999, 152–153) needs to be considered, “But neither Paul nor Plutarch seriously advocated equality for women any more than they advocated equality for slaves. In considering the dynamics of a couple, they were seeking readjustments in the gender system that would persuade potentially rebellious women to accept its strictures.”

them as the temple of God (1 Cor 6:18-20), and pollute the community, rendering them unworthy of the kingdom of God (1 Cor 6:9-10).

The grammar of Paul's argument changes in 1 Cor 7:5 in a striking way. In vv. 2-4 Paul writes his imperatival verbs in the third person, singular form. This suggests that he is articulating a general principle. In v. 5, however, he shifts to the second person, plural imperative, ἀποστερεῖτε, as he applies the principle of husbands and wives meeting one another's sexual needs through addressing his Corinthian auditors directly. The thought of 1 Cor 7:5a continues the thought of vv. 2-4 by reiterating the need for husbands and wives to satisfy one another's sexual desires. It does so by maintaining that failure to do so is tantamount to cheating or defrauding (ἀποστερεῖτε) one's partner of their conjugal rights. Having thoroughly established that married couples have an obligation to couple sexually in order to prevent illicit copulation with its dire consequences of forfeiture of inheritance of the kingdom of God (1 Cor 6:9-10), Paul provides a single instance in which the maxim of 1 Cor 7:1b applies, albeit only for a limit period of time: A husband and wife may through mutual agreement, since they have authority over one another's bodies, abstain from sexual relations for a period of limited duration. The idea of sexual abstinence for religious purposes is well documented in the period both for Jews and for pagans (Poirier and Frankovic 1996, 2-10), so Paul, allowing for what Oster (1992, 58-64) calls sacral celibacy for periods of limited duration, makes perfectly good sense within the culture of the period.

The argumentative structure of 1 Cor 7:5 is complex. The rule regarding marital coitus is that the Corinthian auditors are not to deprive one another (v. 5a). Contrary to the rule, partners may deprive one another sexually *if* two conditions are met: (1) abstinence must be mutually agreed and (2) it must be for a limited (though unspecified by Paul) period of time (v. 5b). The case or rationale for this exception to the rule of no coital deprivation is to facilitate devotion to prayer, that is, to facilitate personal congress with God (v. 5c). Implicit is that this congress with God is facilitated in some way by sexual abstinence, either for reasons of purity or for reasons of religious devotion and commitment. But once the period is completed, the marriage partners must come together again in the marriage bed. The phrase καὶ πάλιν ἐπὶ τὸ αὐτὸ ἦτε suggests that the partners will be physically separated from one another during the period of prayer, and this leads Paul to the rationale for their coming together again, namely, in order to prevent Satan from tempting them during their period of agreed abstinence through their lack of sexual self-control (v. 5d).

The argumentative force of v. 5 is as follows:

- Rule: Marriage partners must not deprive one another sexually.
- Counter Rule: Marriage partners may deprive one another subject to mutual agreement and temporal limitation.
- Case: Agreed upon abstinence is for the purpose of prayer.
- Result: When the period of prayer is over the husband and wife must resume sexual relations.
- Rationale: Come together again so that Satan cannot tempt you to illicit sex on account of your lack of self-control.

The final rationale has its own enthymemic character:

- Rule: Satan seeks to tempt you.
- Case: When abstaining from sex, you are vulnerable to sexual temptation because of lack of self-control.
- Result: Therefore come together again sexually before Satan can tempt you.

The entrance of Satan into what had been a wisdom based discourse on the politics of the body within the lawful household of the marriage partners blends a *topos* from apocalyptic discourse with the wisdom based discussion. The blend of this apocalyptic *topos* with the wisdom based discourse is to provide a rationale or motivation for maintaining order in the area of body control within the household that functions outside the normal working of the household.

Conclusion

The thrust of Paul's reasoning in 1 Cor 7:1-5 leads to the logical conclusion that celibacy within marriage, except under very specific and agreed conditions, is not a virtue, as suggested by the Corinthian's maxim in v. 1b. Quite the contrary, it represents high risk behavior since unilateral celibacy may lead one's partner into sexual sin. The normal Hellenistic cultural reasoning was that men, including married men, were sexually free agents, and married women were sexually bound exclusively to their husbands. This cultural reasoning gives plausibility to the claim of Wire (1990, 79-82) that women were the real source of sexual abstinence among married couples in the Corinthian community, and thus the target of Paul's rhetorical goal of persuading connubial copulation as a prophylaxis against various forms of πορνεία.¹³

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¹³ Winter's (2003a, 77-96) discussion of "new women" in relation to 1 Cor 11:2-16, adds weight to Wire's claim. See also Gordon (1997, 99-139).

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