

One Woman or Two? 1 Corinthians 7:34

ALLEN R. GUENTHER

MENNONITE BRETHREN BIBLICAL SEMINARY, FRESNO, CALIFORNIA

1 Cor 7:34 presents a challenge to text critic and interpreter. Its textual parentage is not self-evident. In this article I argue that the reading chosen is the preferred reading and that the perceived problem originates in the grammatical choices that interpreters have made. Most translators and exegetes interpret the phrase καὶ ἡ γυνή ἢ ἄγαμος καὶ ἡ παρθένος as two nouns (γυνή and παρθένος, "the unmarried woman and the virgin"), thereby creating a conflict with 7:11, where ἄγαμος refers to a divorced woman. The preferred alternative is to read παρθένος adjectivally, as is common in Greek literature. This produces the translation, "and the unmarried chaste woman," resolving the interpreter's dilemma and validating the UBS's textual choice.

Key Words: παρθένος ("virgin"), ἄγαμος ("unmarried"), remarriage

The primary locus of Paul's explicit teaching and associated pastoral counsel regarding marriage, divorce, and remarriage appears in 1 Corinthians 7. The chapter opening ("Now concerning the things you wrote about") indicates that Paul has turned from his own agenda (chaps. 1-6) to address the questions posed by the Corinthians themselves. The issues raised in this chapter pertain to marriage relationships in the Christian community. The matter that will occupy us here is the felt tension or perceived contradiction between Paul's instructions in this chapter concerning divorce and remarriage.

Paul begins the chapter by introducing and teaching about the matter of sexual relations between spouses, presumably after one or both have become Christians (vv. 1-7). He then turns to unmarried men and widows, urging them to remain unmarried if they have the capacity for celibacy (vv. 8-9) but freeing them to remarry if their sexual urges are so intense as to be distracting.

To address the third marital issue Paul cites a word of instruction from the historical Jesus (vv. 10-11). This teaching addresses

Christian couples with the Lord's injunction that Christians should not divorce and attaches a caveat. Jesus' word on the subject recognizes that not every couple will be able to sustain their marriage ("but if they do [divorce]").¹ It takes two committed persons to keep a marriage intact and healthy. The Lord's injunction, however, acknowledges human weakness and identifies the default position as singleness unless they achieve reconciliation. To the husband who might be considering a way out of this marriage, the parallel instruction is: "And a husband shall not divorce his wife."

One of the arguments drawn into the debate to support the contention that Paul teaches the appropriateness of remarriage after divorce comes from the reading of 1 Cor 7:34. The logic takes this form. The word for unmarried (ἄγαμος) is used by Paul to describe widowers (v. 8), a divorced woman (v. 11), and currently single men (v. 32). In v. 34 he carries his train of thought a step forward: unmarried people, whether men (v. 32) or women (v. 34), are free of the preoccupation with the responsibilities of marital life and are therefore able to devote themselves to serving Christ without distraction. If the sexual drive is so strong that it interferes with one's service to God, then that person should marry (v. 36). It is not a sin for ἄγαμοι to marry.

Since the word ἄγαμος previously referred to a divorcée (v. 11), the argument goes, Paul is then validating the remarriage of the divorced person. I quote the text in context (7:32-37):

32. I want you to be free from anxieties. The unmarried man is anxious about the affairs of the Lord, how to please the Lord; 33. but the married man is anxious about the affairs of the world, how to please his wife, 34. **and his interests are divided. And the unmarried woman and the virgin are anxious about the affairs of the Lord, so that they may be holy in body and spirit; but the married woman is anxious about the affairs of the world, how to please her husband.** 35. I say this for your own benefit, not to put any restraint upon you, but to promote good order and unhindered devotion to the Lord. 36. If anyone thinks that he is not behaving properly toward his fiancée, if his passions are strong, and so it has to be, let him marry as he wishes; it is no sin. Let them marry. 37. But if someone stands firm in his resolve, being under no necessity but having his own desire under control, and has determined in his own mind to keep her as his fiancée, he will do well.

The Greek phrase in question is *καί ἡ γυνὴ ἢ ἄγαμος καὶ ἡ παρθένος*. There are a number of textual variants. Bruce Metzger describes this

1. The use of passive mood is significant but need not detain us at this point, since it does not materially affect the issue receiving our attention. Nor will we let the vocabulary of divorce deflect us from the focus on v. 34.

compound noun construction as the "least unsatisfactory reading," giving it a "D" probability rating.² Barrett voices the commentator's options and frustration at finding an intractable textual problem. He sums up the range of the textual variants:

Is it possible to distinguish between *the unmarried woman* (ἡ ἄγαμος) and *the virgin* (ἡ παρθένος)? The fact that the verb following the double subject is singular (μεριμνᾷ) is not decisive. An *unmarried woman* clearly might be virgin; it is possible that the word might refer to a widow (though in this case it is difficult to know why Paul does not use the word widow, χήρα), or to a woman separated from her husband by divorce, or indeed to a single woman who was not a virgin—Schlatter rightly refers to the presence in the church of slaves, who might have had little choice in the matter. In each of these cases, however, *unmarried* seems scarcely the right word to use; this (with the singular verb) may in part account for the variant readings referred to above. The problem is further complicated by the difficulties which the word *virgin* causes in the following verses. It may be that Paul is thinking only of one group, *virgin* being added as a further explanation of *unmarried*: The unmarried woman, by which I really mean not a woman who has lost her husband but the virgin, . . . Alternatively, we might take *virgin* in the ordinary sense, to denote a woman unmarried and without other sexual experience; and *unmarried* to mean a woman (and it seems probable that there were such women in Corinth) who had renounced marriage. But this is guesswork; evidence cannot be cited to prove this meaning of *unmarried* (ἄγαμος).³

It is refreshing to hear an internationally respected scholar admit what many have experienced--that some interpretation is guesswork.

THE CASE FOR READING "TWO WOMEN"

The preponderance of exegetes⁴ and translators of modern English versions follow the longer reading and translate this phrase as referring to two women, "an/ the unmarried woman or/and girl/

2. Bruce Metzger (ed.), *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament* (Stuttgart: United Bible Societies, 1971) 555-56.

3. C. K. Barrett, *A Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians* (Harper New Testament Commentaries; New York: Harper & Row, 1968) 180-81.

4. Ibid., 180-81 ("and"); F. F. Bruce, *I and II Corinthians* (NCB; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans / London: Marshall, Morgan & Scott, 1980) 76 ("betrothed girl"); Gordon H. Clark, *I Corinthians: A Contemporary Commentary* (Nutley, N.J.: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1975) 122-23 ("and"); Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (NICOT; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1989) 345 ("and"); Fred Fisher, *Commentary on 1 and 2 Corinthians* (Waco, Tex.: Word, 1975) 121 ("and the girl"); E. W. Grosheide, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (NICOT; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1953) 180 ("unmarried [= widow or divorced wife] and virgin"); Jean Hering, *The First Epistle of Saint Paul to the Corinthians* (London: Epworth, 1962) 61 ("and"); William F. Orr and James Arthur

virgin/betrothed virgin" (KJV, NAB, NASB, NIV, NRSV, RSV, REB, TEV). The Jerusalem Bible avoids some of the problems of the text by translating the second καὶ, the one within the noun phrase, as "like": "An unmarried woman like a young girl." The translators of the NKJV begin the sentence two words earlier and reconfigure it, "There is a difference between a wife and a virgin." These translations all read the noun phrase to consist of two arthrous nouns (γυνή and παρθένος), the first one being modified by the arthrous adjective (ἡ ἄγαμος).

There are a number of reasons why translators, exegetes, and early church theologians have read the noun phrase as referring to two women. First, it is a grammatically valid reading. It follows the syntax of Classical and Koine Greek, with the nominal construction in the attributive position. Second, lexically the word παρθένος is a noun, not an adjective. Third, ἄγαμος and παρθένος (if read as an adjective) are so close in meaning as to be virtually redundant.⁵ Fourth, Greek writers commonly distinguish between γυνή and παρθένος as representing two distinct groups of women. In normal usage "woman" (γυνή) refers to a married woman; the term παρθένος most frequently refers to a chaste young maiden from the age of six to the time of marriage (ages 12-16)⁶ but includes all chaste unmarried women, regardless of age.⁷

FACTORS FAVORING THE "ONE WOMAN" READING

I will first address each of the arguments supporting the reading "two women" and then proceed to make a case for the "one woman" alternative.

First, regarding the syntax of the noun phrase in question: syntactically the "two women" reading is good Greek. It is, however, only one of three possible readings, all of which are good Greek. The three optional readings are configured as follows: (1) a compound arthrous noun phrase, resulting in a reference to two women, "the unmarried woman and the virgin";⁸ (2) by taking the καὶ in καὶ ἡ

Walther, *1 Corinthians* (AB 32; Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1976) 219-20 ("and"); David Prior, *The Message of 1 Corinthians: Life in the Local Church* (The Bible Speaks Today; Downer's Grove, Ill. and Leicester: InterVarsity, 1985) 133 ("or"); John Ruef, *Paul's First Letter to Corinth* (Westminster Pelican Commentary; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1972) 65 ("or").

5. So, Metzger, *Textual Commentary*, 556.

6. Plato, *Laws* 794.c.5.

7. Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* 2.17.19.2; 3.28.3.4; 6.41.2.7.

8. The noun phrase "women and virgins" appears commonly as an inclusive description of all married and unmarried adult females: cf. Athenaeus, *Deipnophistos* 2.2.76.14; Basil, *Regulae Morales* 31.857.39; Dio Chrysostom, *Sermons* 1.11.29.7; Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* 8.12.5.2; 8.14.12.4; Josephus, *J.W.* 4.257.2; Plutarch, *Numia* 9.5.11.

παρθένος as expegetical and παρθένος as a noun, the result reads, "the unmarried woman, more particularly, the virgin";⁹ (3) reading παρθένος adjectivally results in two conjoined, attributive, arthrous adjectives modifying ἡ γυνή, yielding the translation, "the chaste and unmarried woman" or "the chaste unmarried woman." The effect of readings two and three is identical; the reference is to one woman, who is both unmarried and chaste.

Second, παρθένος is lexically a noun, typically referring to chaste young, pre- and postpubertal girls. Plato speaks of girls after the age of six as παρθένοι. And Plutarch describes Theseus as "taking the maiden who was 'not ripe for marriage, " meaning prepubertal.¹⁰ Plutarch also excludes widows from the category of "virgin."¹¹ The word παρθένος normally refers to a young girl and one who is chaste.¹² In a survey of the occurrences in the Septuagint, Delling concludes that on many occasions παρθένος simply means "girl," though "the chastity of the παρθένος is usually included as self-evident."¹³ But παρθένος is also used adjectivally, as in "virgin soil,"¹⁴ "chaste/virgin daughters,"¹⁵ "O virgin daughter of Zion,"¹⁶ "twelve thousand virgin men filled up"¹⁷ and "to the virgin mother."¹⁸ When used adjectivally, the emphasis lies on the person's purity and inexperience or on her (or his) helplessness and perilous state.

The argument regarding the "virtual redundancy" of "unmarried woman" and "virginal" (as adjective) or "virgin" (as noun) carries little weight. There is semantic overlap between the terms, but παρθένος is a narrower term than ἄγαμος. Within 1 Corinthians 7

9. Raymond F. Collins, *First Corinthians* (Sacra Pagina Series 7; Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 1999) 296: "And the unmarried woman, the virgin."

10. Plutarch, *Theseus* 31.3.2.

11. Compare "Pompey now entered the city, and married Cornelia, a daughter of Metellus Scipio. She was not a virgin (παρθένος), but had lately been left a widow by Publius, the son of Crassus whose virgin bride (παρθένιος) she had been before his death in Parthia" (Plutarch, *Lives Pompey* 55.1.3)

12. *TDNT* 5.827.

13. *TDNT* 5.833. That the thought of virginity or chastity is near the surface in general usage is confirmed by the occasional comment to that effect: "But we must now agree beforehand on this—that she is named a virgin who willingly has consecrated herself to the Lord, and has renounced marriage, and has preferred the life of holiness" (Basil, *Letters* 199.18.31); "and the Muses are called maidens [virgins] implying their modesty and chastity" (Dio Chrysostom, *Discourses* 323.56.11); "a lie to call a previously married woman a virgin" (Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* 5.18.3.5); "no man is allowed to sell a daughter or a sister, unless he find that she is no longer a virgin" (Plutarch, *Lives Solon* 23.2.2).

14. Josephus, *Ag. Ap.* 1.34.6.

15. *Ibid.*, 17.322.2; cf. citations in LSJ 1339B.

16. Isa 37:22; Amos 5:2.

17. Didymus Caecus, *Commentary on Zechariah* 3.71.3; Rev 14:4.

18. *Epistula Ecclesiarum* 001.1.45.4; Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* 5.1.45.5.

ἄγαμος refers to single men (v. 8) and a divorced woman (v. 11).¹⁹ It includes the never married (vv. 25-35) as well as the previously married.²⁰ Furthermore, whatever is claimed about the semantic overlap of "unmarried" and "chaste" is equally true of the terms if they are read as two nouns, "unmarried woman" and "virgin." All three interpretations need to account for the presence of these two similar nouns or adjectives.

There are five additional elements in the text that favor the "one woman" interpretation of 1 Cor 7:34. The first feature is structural. It has frequently been noted that in this chapter of 1 Corinthians Paul's attitude expressed toward women would have been regarded as revolutionary in the Greek social world. In a culture where women were treated disparagingly, were regarded as intellectually inferior to the male, and had no independent legal standing, to publically speak to them as being as morally responsible as their husbands was to elevate them to full personhood.²¹ Paul addresses males and females equally as persons and as moral agents. The balanced, paired address to male and female informs our interpretation of 1 Corinthians 7 at a number of points. The first question Paul tackles in this chapter concerns the appropriateness of (withholding) sexual intercourse between husband and wife. What Paul says to husbands he says also to wives (vv. 1-7). The second group being addressed by Paul is the unmarried (τοῖς ἀγάμοις) and widows (ταῖς χήραις; vv. 8-9). The balanced male-female/female-male pattern of address²² suggests that τοῖς ἀγάμοις would represent widowers, since the gender-paired counterpart is explicitly identified as widows. The next group to which he turns (vv. 10-11) is Christians whose spouses are divorcing them for whatever reason, husbands and wives being explicitly identified. Husbands and wives with not-yet-Christian spouses are the focus of vv. 12-16, τοῖς . . . λοιποῖς being Paul's common way of referring to nonbelievers.²³ This is followed by a lengthier discussion and in-

19. See argument below.

20. For a fuller treatment of the referents of παρθένος, see LSJ and TDNT 5.826-37.

21. Roger Just, *Women in Athenian Law and Life* (London: Routledge, 1989) 164. For further discussion of women in the Greco-Roman world of late antiquity, see Sue Blundell, *Women in Ancient Greece* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995); W. K. Lacey, *The Family in Classical Greece* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1968); David M. Schaps, *Economic Rights of Women in Ancient Greece* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1979).

22. Fee (*First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 270; cf. pp. 287-88) observes that the argument alternates between men and women 12 times in this chapter, and "in every case there is complete mutuality between the sexes."

23. Kistemaker, *Exposition of the First Epistle to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 1993) 229, quoting David L. Dungan, *The Sayings of Jesus in the Churches of Paul: The Use of the Synoptic Tradition in the Regulation of Early Church Life* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1971) 93.

struction regarding virgins (τῶν παρθένων; vv. 25-38). But who are these "virgins"?

The semantic field of the noun παρθένος includes unmarried, chaste males²⁴ as well as unmarried, chaste females. Liddell contends that παρθένος may also include in its semantic field "unmarried women who are not virgins."²⁵ An examination of LSJ's four cited occurrences of the use of παρθένος with a nonvirginal meaning raises questions about his conclusions. All occurrences refer to virgins who were raped. Instead of being referred to as "the former virgin" or "the virgin who was violated," she is simply referred to as "the virgin." No confusion of referent results and subsequent references to the woman do not identify her as a virgin. Horsely contends that the reference to "his virgin" in v. 36 and the verb "cause to marry" in v. 38 affect the reading of v. 34. The "virgin," then, must be a reference to something different or more specific than a young unmarried woman. He concludes that the word "virgins" refers to betrothed young women.²⁶ I am not disputing his interpretation of vv. 36 and 38 but it does not follow that the reference to "virgin" in vv. 25 and 34 must also be to betrothed girls, any more than that the word ἄγαμος must have the same meaning in its several occurrences in this chapter. How, we ask, does a betrothed woman's betrothal make her more capable of focusing on serving the Lord? The opposite is more likely the case.

24. Epiphanius, *Heresies* 28.7; Chrysostom, *Homilies* 12; Philostratus, *h.e.* 7.14; Jer 5:21; Rev 14:4.

25. LSJ contend that παρθένος may also include in its semantic field "unmarried women who are not virgins" (p. 1339B). They cite four references (Homer, *Iliad* 2.514; Pindar, *Pythian* 3.34; Sophocles, *Trachiniae* 1219; Aristophanes, *Nubes* 530), none of which turns up on examination to identify an unmarried woman who is not a virgin as a παρθένος. This statement might be contested in the *Iliad* and *Nubes* texts, so I comment on them. Homer writes: "And they that dwelt in Aspledon and Orchomenus . . . were led by Ascalaphus and Ialmenus, sons of Ares, whom in the palace of Actor, son of Azeus, Astyoche, the honored maiden (παρθένος) conceived of mighty Ares, when she had entered into her upper chamber; for he lay with her in secret" (LCL). Astyoche's reputation as an honorable virgin was intact until Ares invaded her private quarters (upper chamber) and took his pleasure on her.

Aristophanes uses "virgin" metaphorically. Apparently he had submitted a literary work in competition for a prize that he did not win. He felt raped by the literary judges. So he describes himself as an innocent virgin poet whose child (the play he wrote) was conceived out of wedlock and exposed to the world as a foundling. This can hardly be adduced as evidence that the semantic field of παρθένος includes sexually active single women.

To LSJ's list we should add Gen 34:3, in which it is said that Shechem fell in love with the virgin (παρθένος) Dinah, after he had raped her.

26. Richard A. Horsley, *1 Corinthians* (Abingdon New Testament Commentaries; Nashville: Abingdon, 1998) 104-5; cf. Bruce, *1 and 2 Corinthians*, 76.

We conclude that the section on virgins (7:25-38) includes male and female virgins, the male virgins being addressed in the second-person singular "you" and the female virgins in the third-person singular ("she"): ἡ παρθένης (v. 28). Paul advises them, separately, that neither sins by marrying, but he foresees troubles for those who do marry because of the nature of the times. His warning is a measure of his foresight and his concern.

1 Cor 7:32-34 contains another example of Paul's gender-paired teachings and instructions. He explains the motivation for his advice to the male virgins and the married men to remain single ("I want you to be free from anxieties" [v. 32]), and then he balances this (καί, "and") with parallel comments to the female virgins ("the celibate unwed woman") and married women. To read the noun phrase in question as two women, "an unwed woman and a virgin (παρθένης)," is to break the symmetry of this text, which has a single referent in each case. Furthermore, previously married women, whether widows or divorcees, are not παρθένοι;²⁷ "unmarried" contains "virgin" within its semantic field. These lexical terms are not coextensive.

27. At least not in the first Christian century. Five texts have been adduced as evidence that widows are sometimes called "virgins." The reader may wish to judge the weight of this evidence, so I offer the texts for consideration:

Plutarch (*Lives Pompey* 55.1.3): "She was not a virgin but had lately been left a widow by Publius, the son of Crassus, whose virgin bride (παρθένης) she had been before his death in Parthia" (LCL);

Ignatius (*Letter to Smyrna* 13.1): "I salute the families of my brethren with their wives and children, and the maidens (παρθένοι) who are called widows" (LCL); Ignatius may be reflecting the incorporation of older virgins, who were sometimes admitted into the church office of "widow," an office of great dignity and respect. Tertullian comments on the relationship between virgins and the office of widow: "I know plainly that in a certain place a virgin of less than forty years of age has been placed in the order of widows . . . a virgin widow" (Part Fourth, *Elucidations*, chap. 9);

Clement of Alexandria (*Stromata* 3.16): "Today there are some people who place the widow above the virgin in self-control, on the grounds that she has shown a high-minded rejection of a pleasure she has enjoyed" (LCL);

Idem (*Stromata* 7.12): "For he who has exercised concupiscence and then restrained himself, is like a widow who becomes a virgin by continence" (ANF); Clement's comment may reflect the adjectival use of "virgin" with the connotation of "chaste." Or it could be read as a metaphorical use of the term: the widow remained chaste after the death of her husband, as chaste as any virgin.

Chrysostom (*Epistles* 2.4): "But you did not hold yourself by my words, even though we enrolled you in the band of those holy virgins for the life of widowhood" (my translation). By Chrysostom's time (the fourth century), the office of widow was surpassed in significance by the order of virgin. The widow being addressed (we conclude), was inducted into the honored order of "virgin" by the oath of chastity (cf. Jean Laporte, *The Role of Women in Early Christianity*

A second argument is that of context. To read the text (v. 34) as referring to a divorcee (unmarried) is to create an unnecessary conflict between Paul's explicit instruction to divorced Christians (v. 11) and his inspired wisdom. The divorcee shall remain unmarried or be reconciled to her spouse. Paul would hardly turn about at this point to validate the remarriage of the divorcee. Surely he must be given credit for recognizing and avoiding such an inconsistency within the compass of five paragraphs. Furthermore, Paul explicitly directs his comments in vv. 25-38 to the virgins. Whether or not we accept the view that these virgins include both male and female, it should address virgins. This reality serves as a contextual factor in shaping our understanding of the text.

It might be objected at this point that vv. 25-29 support the contention that Paul endorses the remarriage of divorced persons. I quote the text:

Now about virgins . . . I think it is good to remain as you are. . . .
 Are you bound to a wife? Do not seek to be free.
 Are you free from a wife? Do not seek a wife.
 But if you marry, you do not sin;
 And if a (the) virgin marries, she does not sin. (vv. 27-28a)

Paul's recurring instruction and advice in this chapter is for the Corinthian Christians to remain in the social condition in which they find themselves at conversion or at the present moment (7:7, 8, 12-13, 17, 20, 24, 26, 40). As part of the supporting rationale for virgins to remain as they are (unmarried), Paul offers what appears to be a common proverb²⁸ to illustrate the wisdom of his advice. As a proverb

[*Studies in Women and Religion 7*; Lewiston, N.Y.: Edwin Mellen, 1982] 70;
 Bonnie Bowman Thurston, *The Widows: A Women's Ministry in the Early Church*
 [Minneapolis: Fortress, 1989] 114-45).

28. I offer the following arguments in favor of its proverbial character. First, 1 Cor 7:28 resembles extant Greek proverbs, maxims, and wisdom sayings. Will Deming (*Paul on Marriage and Celibacy: The Hellenistic Background of 1 Corinthians 7* [SNTSMS 83; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995] 173-77) cites some of the Stoic and Cynic maxims in the same second-person, question-and-answer rhetorical style, as, for example (p. 164):

Never say about anything "I lost it," but rather, "I gave [it] back."
 Your little child died? — it was given back!
 Your-wife died? — she was given back!
 (quoting Epictetus, *Enchiridion* 11; cf. 1 Cor 6:12-13; 7:18, 21)

It has the feel of a proverb; it comes in terse, compact, contrasting parallelism. Second, its *meaning* fits with the immediately preceding argument (in favor of singleness), though the *subject matter* (about men living contentedly in the state of marriage

taken from the domain of marital life it is used not because of what it says about marriage or remarriage but to undergird Paul's advice for virgins to remain unmarried in order to serve Christ with greater devotion and without distraction. Furthermore, the reference to binding and loosing says nothing about remarriage, since it explicitly addresses virgins.

A third argument in favor of reading ἡ γυνὴ ἡ ἄγαμος καὶ ἡ παρθένος as a single noun phrase is that in classical and Koine Greek ἄγαμος frequently stands as one of multiple adjectival descriptors or predicate complements. Demosthenes speaks of a deceased person as having died "without issue (ἄπαιδα) and unmarried (ἄγαμον)."²⁹ Dionysius Halicarnassus relates a speech by Augustus in which he addressed his troops, speaking first to: "those who were fathers; afterwards the childless and unmarried (ἄτέκνοις καὶ ἀγάμοις)."³⁰ Some lists contain up to four such adjectives: "unmarried, childless, without a city, friendless (ἄγαμος ἄτεκνος ἄπολις ἄφιλος)."³¹

Related to the conjunction of ἄγαμος and παρθένος in our text in 1 Cor 7:34 are the statements by Chrysostom, "This is the incarnation that a child is born from an unmarried virgin (ἐξ ἀγάμου παρθένου),"³² and by John Malalas, "and the unmarried virgins (αἱ ἄγαμοὶ παρθένοι) attach themselves to a man."³³ Unlike Paul's statement to the Corinthians, the word παρθένος in these two texts functions as a noun, but these texts indicate that ἄγαμος and παρθένος occur together in order to stress both elements, singleness and celibacy. Plutarch writes of a certain usurper, Amulius, who "fearing lest (a) brother's daughter

that they now occupy) seems out of place. But, then, the vocabulary of proverbs do not need to be precisely on the subject to convey meaning. "A rolling stone gathers no moss" is about active people, not about geology, physics, or botany. Third, proverbs and maxims tend toward universals; this saying is inclusive in the use of binding and loosing terminology. Fourth, Paul sprinkles his letter with Corinthian slogans and proverbs without quotation marks or other identifying signals, which makes them difficult to identify (cf. Fee, *First Corinthians*, 251-52, 276-77). One of the key signals used in their identification as rebuttal against his opponents is that they appear to conflict with other teaching in the context. Indeed, the Corinthians were known for their proverbs. In fact, a compound of the word "Corinth" (*Dios Corinthos*) means, "to say something twice," which is characteristic of proverbs. Fifth, the maxim addresses men only, a feature uncharacteristic of Paul's careful balance of male and female privilege and responsibility throughout this discussion. Sixth, if this is Pauline teaching, it conflicts with what he is about to say (v. 39) and with what he has said a few verses before (v. 11) in emphasizing his authoritative instruction to married Christians.

29. Demosthenes, *Orations* 44.32.

30. Dionysius, *Roman History* 56; Pin. 1.2; cf. *Roman History* 9.22.2; Euripides, *Helen* 689.

31. Euripides, *IT*. 220.

32. Chrysostom, 436.6.14.

33. Malalas, *Chronology* 71.19; cf. *Scholia* in Aeschylum 001.*Eum.*69a.2; 003.*Eum.*69.1; 023.69.1.

should have children, made her a priestess of Vesta, bound to live unwedded and a virgin (ἄγαμον καὶ παρθένον) all her days."³⁴ And in the *Deeds of the Romans and Greeks*³⁵ he describes the marvelous event of a person "born of a husbandless and unwed woman (ἐκ γυναικίος ἀγάμου καὶ ἀνεγγύου)." These examples from the first Christian century show that the noun παρθένος occurs adjectivally.³⁶ They confirm that adjectives with very similar meanings may be conjoined to modify a single noun. And finally, they establish that ἄγαμος and παρθένος do function together as a pair of adjectives.

The fourth argument favoring the "one woman" reading of 1 Cor 7:34 is that it brings about agreement between the subject and the following verbs that it governs. The two verbs (μεριμνᾷ and ἦ) are singular, requiring a singular subject. Some translators who have read the text as representing two women have attempted to address the problem of lack of concord by translating the conjunction καὶ linking ἡ ἄγαμος and ἡ παρθένος, as "or." This stands as a possibility, but in the NT καὶ is clearly "or" only when it conjoins successive numbers ("Any charge must be sustained by the evidence of two or [καί] three witnesses," 2 Cor 13:1) or an alternative sequence of successive events ("If he comes during the middle of the night, or [καί] near dawn, and finds them so, blessed are those slaves," Luke 12:38).

Smyth's observation may be raised as a challenge to this perceived need for concord. He notes that "the verb may agree with the nearest or most important of two or more subjects."³⁷ But there is nothing here that would cause us to recognize γυνή as a more important subject than παρθένος. Robertson observes that, "If the predicate follows this compound subject, it is put in the plural nearly always. But the 'Pindaric construction' . . . puts the verb in the singular."³⁸ In the "Pindaric construction" a compound subject regularly precedes a singular verb, as in 1 Cor 7:34. Robertson draws attention to a number of examples of this construction found in the NT³⁹ (Matt 5:18, "heaven and earth shall pass away"; Matt 36:19, "where moth and rust destroy"; Jas 5:3, "your silver and gold are corroding away").⁴⁰ The effect of this construction is to emphasize the totality of the verbal character.⁴¹ It is

34. Plutarch, *Lives* Romulus 3.3.5.

35. Idem, *Deeds of the Romans and Greeks* 288.F.8.

36. Cf. Plutarch Aristides 20.7.4; Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* 8.12.3.4; Josephus, *J.W.* 4.163.1; 5.165.2; 17.34.3; 17.322.2; Didymus Caecus 010.3.71.3.

37. Herbert Weir Smyth, *Greek Grammar* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press; 1956) 265.

38. A. T. Robertson, *A Grammar of the Greek New Testament* (Nashville: Broadman, 1934) 405.

39. James 5:2-3; Matt 6:19; Mark 4:41; 1 Cor 15:50.

40. We could add some 20 occurrences from the LXX, of which the following are representative: Judg 19:19; Esth 4:14; Ps 54:6; Isa 7:24.

41. Robertson, *Grammar*, 405.

true that γυνή and παρθένος appear together as a pair representing all women.⁴² To read our nominal phrase as a Pindaric construction, however, is to *reduce* the scope of the verb rather than to emphasize its totality because of the occurrence of the delimiting nature of the adjective ἄγαμος.

A fifth argument in favor of the "one woman" reading of 1 Cor 7:34 derives from the logic of Paul's thought. In 1 Cor 7:32-35 Paul is commending singleness on the grounds that it frees the person from the necessary and legitimate time-consuming demands of family life. Married people have accepted family responsibilities that need to be fulfilled. These are their primary obligation as Christians, even if this means they have less time and energy with which to serve the Lord.⁴³ But many of the divorced and widowed would also have parental obligations. Indeed, those who are single parents would be under more rather than fewer constraints for serving God unhindered because of the increased preoccupation created by the need both to maintain a livelihood and care for children.

EPEXEGETICAL NOUN OR COMPOUND ADJECTIVES?

The epexegetical interpretation of καὶ ἡ παρθένος rests on the reading of παρθένος as a noun rather than an adjective. Both are possible, though frequency of usage favors its use as a noun. The infrequent epexegetical use of καὶ and the fact that there is no textual support for this reading favor the double-adjective reading. Functionally, the epexegetical noun and compound adjective readings are so similar that it is not necessary to decide between them.

CONCLUSION

The noun phrase ἡ γυνὴ ἡ ἄγαμος καὶ ἡ παρθένος can be read in any of three ways. With hardly an exception, it is read as two conjoined nouns forming a compound subject ("the unmarried woman and the virgin"). In this paper I have argued that it should either be read epexegetically as "and the unmarried woman, that is, the virgin" or, more likely, as a single noun modified by conjoined arthrous adjectives with the resultant translation, "the unmarried and chaste woman" or the "chaste unmarried woman."

The consequence of accepting this reading is twofold. First, 1 Cor 7:34 excludes divorcees and widows and identifies the virgin alone as

42. Athenaeus *Deipnophistos* 2.2.76.14; Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* 8.12.5.2; 8.19.12.4; Plutarch *Numia* 9.5.11; Josephus *Ant.* 4.257.2.

43. 1 Tim 2:15; 3:4, 12; 5:4, 8, 16.

having the capacity to give herself without distraction in serving the Lord. That is, this verse refers to one category of women rather than two, as has generally been interpreted. Second, a further result of this reading is to reinforce the coherence of Paul's teaching on the subject of the remarriage of those who have been divorced. Paul's teaching on this subject is consistent: "Do not divorce, but if you do, remain single unless you are reconciled." The implication is that reconciliation would express itself in remarriage to the former spouse if both were still unmarried. If reconciliation is not possible, for whatever reason, the "default" condition is singleness.