I Corinthians 7 deals with marriage and related topics. The chapter may be conveniently subdivided: vv. 1–7 contain Paul’s discussion on conjugal rights; in vv. 8–9 Paul gives his famous advice to the unmarried and widows; in vv. 10–11 Paul repeats Jesus’ command prohibiting divorce; vv. 12–24 concern the problem of the Christian married to a pagan; vv. 25–38 return to the problem of the unmarried; and vv. 39–40 concern the remarriage of widows. This to-ing and fro-ing is typical of Paul’s often irregular method of presenting arguments. Our first problem is the unity of vv. 25–38. We need to ask (a) if the section is connected or whether vv. 36–8 concern a separate problem from vv. 25–35 and (b) which group or groups of persons in the Corinthian church Paul is addressing in these verses.

Commentaries on I Corinthians usually point out the many exegetical problems in vv. 36–8. If one follows the RV and Allo’s commentary\(^1\) then one assumes Paul is giving advice to the father of a girl who is beyond marriageable age; if the father thinks he is behaving dishonourably to his daughter in this regard Paul assures him he is not sinning by letting her marry; but if he is resolute to keep her unmarried, his behaviour is even more commendable. Such an interpretation is, however, strange. As Héring points out\(^2\) there has been no previous mention of parental duties nor is there any explanation why the father should have scruples because his daughter is too old for marriage. The verb \(\gamma\alpha\mu\epsilon\iota\sigma\sigma\alpha\nu\) (v. 36) introduces an abrupt change of subject: a suitor has not been mentioned in the context. The \(v.l. \gamma\alpha\mu\epsilon\iota\tau\omega\) read by \(D^* G 1611\) and others is clearly secondary to avoid this awkward plural.

The language in these verses is similarly against the traditional interpretation. \(\pi\omicron\rho\omicron\theta\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\zeta\) is an unusual word to use for ‘daughter’. The RV

---


for example finds it necessary to add the word ‘daughter’ after ‘virgin’ in both v. 36 and v. 37. The adjective ὑπέρακμος is difficult to translate but the rendering ‘past marriageable age’ ‘past the flower of her age’ required for this interpretation is not necessarily the most natural translation for the adjective (see below) nor is it likely in the context of I Cor. 7 that Paul would urge a scrupulous father to give his daughter in marriage merely because she is advancing in years.

The reason why this interpretation has been favoured is because of the verb γαμίζω in v. 38 or ἐκγάμιζω which I would wish to argue is the correct reading both here and throughout the New Testament whenever it occurs as a variant. (ἐκ)γάμιζω is usually assumed to mean ‘to give in marriage’ as at Matt. 22:30 and parallels and Matt. 24:38 and parallel. If this is so, then parental duty seems to be implied in the context but it is by no means necessary to translate the verb as transitive. As Lietzmann points out, the classical rule whereby -ιζω (transitive) verbs are differentiated from -εω (intransitive) verbs is not always respected in Koine Greek. He points to the examples ὑστερίζω, γνωρίζω, χρονίζω, ὑμίζω, παννυχίζω, ἐλπίζω, ὑβρίζω, and ἐρίζω as indications of the weakening of the transitive -ιζω form in Hellenistic usage. (ἐκ) γάμιζω could therefore be used by Paul as a synonym for γαμέω.

The RSV assumes a different situation altogether for these verses. The interpretation in this translation is that Paul in v. 36 is speaking of engaged couples. παρθένος in 36–8 therefore means ‘fiancée’. Paul is advising the man to marry his fiancée if his passions are strong although he is specially commended if he refrains from marrying her. In this translation ὑπέρακμος means ‘highly sexed’, a meaning found elsewhere in the second-century medical writer Soranus (see Liddell and Scott). Grammatically ὑπέρακμος could refer either to the man or to his fiancée, but the context makes it more likely that it refers to the man because it is he who is the subject of the nearest finite verb. γαμείτωσαν now appears naturally in its context and refers to the girl and her suitor. This interpretation seems probable and agrees with Paul’s advice about marriage in v. 2, v. 6 and especially v. 9. The phrase

---

4 See also J.K. Elliott, The Greek Text of the Epistles to Timothy and Titus (Studies and Documents 36) (Utah: University of Utah Press, 1968), p. 79.