



Paul on Marriage and Celibacy: The Hellenistic Background of 1 Corinthians 7

Mr. Will Deming

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Foreword by Raymond F. Collins / Paul is traditionally seen as one of the founders of Christian sexual asceticism. As early as the second century C.E. church leaders looked to him as a model for their lives of abstinence. But is this a correct reading of Paul? What exactly did Paul teach on the subjects of marriage and celibacy? Will Deming here answers these questions - often in provocative new ways. / By placing Paul's statements on marriage and celibacy against the backdrop of ancient Hellenistic society, Deming constructs a coherent picture of Paul's views. He shows that the conceptual world in which Paul lived and wrote had substantially vanished by 100 C.E., and terms like "sin," "body," "sex," and "holiness" began to acquire moral implications quite unlike those Paul knew. Paul conceived of marriage as a social obligation that had the potential of distracting Christians from Christ. For him, celibacy was the single life, free from such distraction, not a life of saintly denial. Sex, in turn, was not sinful but natural, and sex within marriage was both proper and necessary.

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