In this approach to “anxiety” and “care,” Paul even sees himself as a paradigm: “What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, do ...” (Phil 4:9). Paul is an example of personal anxiety. But how does Paul deal with “anxiety” and “care” when it concerns the issues of daily life – especially those issues that do not concern him? Can Paul also act as a personal example in the field of anxiety and family life when he himself refrains from living in wedlock (1 Cor 9)? Does he adhere to ancient ascetic verdicts – expressed by Menander and others – according to which “having a wife and being the father of children ... brings many anxious moments in life?”

To answer this question, I will examine 1 Cor 7, where Paul conceptualizes another type of individual “anxiety” and “care”. It is in the discourse about sexual ethics that μεριμνάω occupies its most prominent place – even as wordplay (v. 34a: μεριζομαι).

3. 1 Cor 7:32ff.: anxiety and individual decision-making

In 1 Cor 7:32ff., Paul remarks: ‘Take your existential μέριμνα as a tool for deciding about your sexual behavior and your family life.’ Here, Paul makes human “anxiety” into a criterion of individual ethics. In doing so, he contributes to a broader ancient discourse about “selfhood”. In her analysis of early Imperial Roman literature, Shadi Bartsch argues that the sense of the human Self is especially developed in its encounter with sexuality and ethics. In Paul’s view, of course, the “action space” for developing selfhood via sexuality and ethics is primarily not Roman society but the sphere of ecclesia. Individual ethics is...
thus framed by *communal identity*. Before I examine how Paul conceptualizes “anxiety” as a tool of individual sexual ethics, I will first outline Paul’s general concept of sexual ethics in its communal setting.

### 3.1. Paul and sexual ethics: 1 Thess 4 and beyond

From his earliest letter-writing, Paul deals with sexual ethics. Like other topics of ethical discourse, questions about sexual ethics primarily result from discussions within the community, but they also emerge from communication with those “outside” (ἐξω) the community. Paul expresses his goals of general ethical teaching most clearly in 1 Thess 4, by stating: “we exhort you ... to mind your own affairs, and to work with your hands, as we charged you; so that you may command the respect of outsiders, and be dependent on nobody” (v. 10-12pass.).

Like various other fields of ethical teaching – such as law, the economy, food and dress codes – in sexual ethics, the formal tools of Pauline rhetoric are also diverse. Hermut Löhr writes, “... Paul’s ethics seems to be on the border between ‘Gebotsethik’ (ethics based on commandments) and ‘Einsichtsethik’ (ethics based on insight or understanding);” the variety of ethical arguments indeed corresponds to the diversity of topics discussed; Paul frequently exposes something like “dispositional ethics”. In all ethical discourse, Paul is ultimately concerned with the “sanctification” or “holiness” (ἁγιασμός) of the community as a communal entity. This concern is *socio-politically* significant: Paul intends to strengthen the social attractiveness of Christ-believing communities and to organize communal life around a perfect “political environment,” as it is discussed in political theory in and beyond Aristotle (*pol* 9:1280b). By caring for the community’s sanctification, issues of sexual behavior seem to be most popular and most urgent – for the group *and* the individual (s. above).

Paul’s ethical admonitions are sometimes very concrete. This is most evident within the so-called catalogues of virtues and vices, for instance in 1 Cor 6:9: “... neither the immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor sexual perverts ... will inherit the kingdom of God.” Here, by addressing groups of people, Paul almost exclusively incriminates what he believes constitutes sexual immorality:

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25 Hartmut Leppin identifies that, as opposed to the Roman widows, Christian widows, for instance, were not forced to re-marry. The law of marriage was much more liberal among Christian women than among Romans: “Das Christentum wertete die Jungfrauschaft oder das Witwentum höher als die Ehe, was manchen Frauen neue Freiräume erschloss,” FAZ 298 (23.12.2014), 40 (Rhein-Main Zeitung).
πόρνοι, ἀρσενοκοῖται. However, as early as 1 Thess 4, Paul proclaims: “… this is the will of God, your sanctification (ἁγιασμός): that you abstain from unchastity (πορνεία); that each one of you know how to take a wife for himself in holiness and honor, not in the passion of lust (ἐν πάθει ἐπιθυμίας) like heathen who do not know God … For God has not called us for uncleanless (ἀκαρθασία), but in holiness (ἁγιασμός) …” (1 Thess 4:3-8pass.).

Paul’s approach to sexual ethics here is exhortative. It addresses the collective of community members. The discoursal frame is religious. Since Paul aims at the sanctification of communal sexual ethics, current exegesis tends to argue that, in his sexual ethics, Paul wishes to implement cultic purity. It seems as though Paul combines various traditions of ethical teaching, which are partly derived from Jewish instruction and partly analogous to Stoic ethics: When Paul wants the Thessalonians to “abstain” (ἀπέχεσθαι) in a general sense from “immorality” (πορνεία), he also uses a “technical term” – ἀπέχεσθαι – which “aimed at distinguishing Christian from pagan morality.”27 It is thus common for current scholarship on Pauline ethics to emphasize how, in his teaching about sexuality, Paul combines Hellenistic moral philosophy and Jewish parenesis.28 Will Deming has worked extensively on this topic, especially in regard to 1 Cor 7.29

Such a description of Pauline sexual ethics might be adequate. However, this description focuses on either the collective or communal or the religious aspects of Paul’s moral arguments. Thus, as much as scholars tend to neglect Paul’s concept of “anxiety” and “care,” they also tend to overlook the individual implications of Pauline ethics. In 1 Cor 7 in particular, Paul does not restrict himself to a collective moral exhortation; rather, he presupposes and enforces a human self-understanding according to which ethical discourse can be developed in-

26 For a discussion of whether ἀρσενοκοῖται in 1 Cor 6:9 means “homosexuality,” cf.: W. L. Petersen, Homosexuals; D. F. Wright, Homosexuals; J. Boswell, Christianity, 344, considers “male prostitutes” here.

27 A. J. Malherbe, Letters, 225. Πορνεία itself is a broad polemical expression against various kinds of illegitimate sexuality, F. W. Horn, “Heiden,” 297. As Abraham J. Malherbe identifies, Paul’s teaching against ἀκαρθασία κτλ. “was [also] part of basic Jewish instruction in moral behavior”, ibid., 226. At the same time, some elements of Paul’s language, for instance the expression “not in lustful passion”, “was derived from the Stoics. They defined pathos … as an irrational and unnatural movement of the soul, as an impulse in excess … It is a troubled movement of the soul, an imtemperate longing, disobedient to reason, that may rightly be termed desire or lust” (229f.; with reference to, e.g., Cicero, Tusc Disp 3:7; 3:23f.; 4:11). However, there is a significant difference between the philosophical and the Pauline incrimination of pathos: “Instead of understanding lustful passion as opposition to reason, as the philosophers did, Paul asserts that its cause was ignorance of God. In this he was Jewish” (ibid., 230).


Individually. He does so by taking himself as a paradigm and pointing to his own human “anxiety”: consequently, μέριμνα occurs as an anthropological viz. ethical criterion of individual decision-making.

3.2. Sexuality and anxiety: individual decision-making in 1 Cor 7

In 1 Cor 7:32, Paul states: “I want you to be free from anxieties (ἀμέριμνος).” This seems to be close to Paul’s admonition in Phil 4 (s. above). Again, Paul is concerned with the analysis of human existence because, in 1 Cor 7, the context is also full of various temporal, that is eschatological, motifs. Paul says, “the appointed time has grown very short (ὁ καιρὸς συνεσταλμένος).” However, in this frame of correctly perceiving time, Paul does not only admonish his community; rather, he makes his engagement with individual anxiety into the final criterion of sexual ethics.

How does Paul achieve this? The general discourse about sexual ethics is raised by the Corinthians themselves, who write to Paul and ask him about various subjects (1 Cor 7:1; περὶ δέ) which all concern the legitimacy of sexual practice among Christ believers. One central question is whether those who are unmarried should marry. If the Corinthians simply take Paul as an individual paradigm here, they will remain single and live unmarried. And, indeed, Paul recommends his unmarried lifestyle to the Corinthians (v. 8).

At the same time, Paul is well aware of the moral challenges of remaining unmarried. He argues that, if the Corinthians “cannot exercise self-control, they should marry. For it is better to marry than to be aflame with passion (πυροῦσθαι)” (v. 9). Paul is clearly aware of erotic affects, and he is realistic enough to consider these affects when responding to the Corinthian questions (cf. v. 36). Since he cannot refer to the Lord’s authority here (v. 10), everything Paul says about the status of being “unmarried” is based upon his individual view: “I have no command (ἐπιταγή) of the Lord, but I give my opinion (γνώμη) as one who by the Lord’s mercy is trustworthy” (v. 25). At this point, Paul actually reveals the principles of individual decision-making.

In light of eschatological hope, Paul would like the Corinthians to adopt an adequate type of Christ-believing “anxiety.” For this reason, he does not intend to “lay any restraint (βρόχος) upon” the Corinthians (v. 35). He therefore identifies various options for handling “anxiety” by, of course, sympathizing with how “anxiety” appears among those who are unmarried.31 “The unmarried man

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30 Current studies on ancient emotions have revealed the extent to which Paul was aware of emotionality, which he also made use of as a letter-writer.
31 For Paul’s promotion of celibacy, see F. E. Brenk, “Most Beautiful,” 108ff.
is anxious (μεριμνᾷ) about the affairs of the Lord, how to please the Lord; but the married man is anxious (μεριμνᾷ) about worldly affairs, how to please his wife, and his interests are divided. And the unmarried woman or girl is anxious (μεριμνᾷ) about the affairs of the Lord, how to be holy in body and spirit; but the married woman is anxious (μεριμνᾷ) about worldly affairs, how to please her husband” (v. 32b-34). Paul concludes that getting married “is no sin” (v. 36), but refraining from marriage is a better choice (v. 38).

Paul’s recommendation to remain single is remarkable, especially when seen in the light of Hellenistic-Roman politics and culture: Augustan marriage legislation was designed to increase the birthrate in the early Roman Empire, and Aristotelian politics is rooted in the theory that marriage is the prototype of communitarian life in the polis (pol 1:2). Most evidently, in 1 Cor 7, Paul elaborates on eschatological “anxiety” as an individual tool of decision-making. In Paul’s argument, μέριμνα is a basic pattern of anthropology and ethics. While Paul generally engages in communal affairs, such as the οἰκοδομή (“manner of building”) of the Corinthian community, in 1 Cor 7, he is primarily concerned with each person’s existential “anxiety”; in this way, he reflects on the female and the male person equally. Reflections about “anxiety” and “care” help to develop the experience of the human Self. It is precisely in this that the Corinthians can ultimately follow Paul’s personal example. It is the individual paradigm of decision-making rather than Paul’s personal lifestyle or his case for celibacy (Dieter Zeller) or practices of “temporary abstinence” that the Corinthians should follow.

32 Lex Julia de Maritandis Ordinibus (18 BCE); Lex Pavia Poppaea (9 CE) – cf. also: Suetonius, Aug 34. Cf. also: Kolb, Rom, 367 etc.
33 Cf. also H. Flashar, Aristoteles, 108ff.
34 Although the topic might specifically allow for reflections on “anxiety,” Dieter Zeller shows how, in antiquity in particular, the existential experience of “anxiety” applies to the field of marriage and family life. D. Zeller, Brief, 264: “... Dieses existentielle Besetztsein von den Ängsten um den Lebensunterhalt und die Angehörigen kennzeichnet aber nach volkstümlicher Anschauung gerade Ehe und Familie” – with reference to Sophocles, Antiphon, Menander, and Papyrus XIV:17 – Neuer Wettstein II:1:301ff.
36 Cf. D. Zeller, Brief, 278.