

1Corinthians 7

Verses 1-5: husband and wife relations

Verses 6-11: marry or not to marry

Verses 12-16: unbelieving spouses

Verses 17-40: remain in the way that you were called (verse 17, 20, and 24 repeat this)

These verses sub categorized:

- verses 17-20 circumcision (17 and intro and summary); verse 20 a summary and conclusion
- verses 21-24: slaves (verses 24 is a summary again); comments on spiritual slavery as well
- verses 25-28 virgin daughters and married people
 - verses 29-31: time is shortened, a type of aside
- verses 32-35 undistracted devotion to the Lord
- verses 36-40: be married or do not be married, but Paul thinks it is better to remain as you were when called.

Verse by verse analysis:

Review 1 Cor. 6:20:

For you have been bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body.

1 Corinthians 7:1–5 (NASB95)

Teaching on Marriage

- 1** *Now concerning the things about which you wrote, it is good for a man not to touch a woman.*
- 2** *But because of immoralities, each man is to have his own wife, and each woman is to have her own husband.*
- 3** *The husband must fulfill his duty to his wife, and likewise also the wife to her husband.*
- 4** *The wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does; and likewise also the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does.*
- 5** *Stop depriving one another, except by agreement for a time, so that you may devote yourselves to prayer, and come together again so that Satan will not tempt you because of your lack of self-control.*

First some excerpts from a Tim Keller message:

First of all, it was shocking in that day. It's hard for us to realize as individualistic people who live in an individualistic society how in traditional societies (especially ancient societies), there was no such thing as individual honor, success, or achievement. You had no individual honor, success, or achievement. You only had family honor, success, or achievement. You as an individual could not be given prominence per se. There was no individual achievement per se. Your family had to become prominent. Your family had to be successful.

Therefore, you had to be married, you had to have children, or you were no one. You had no future. You had no security. You had no significance at all. There were no single adults unless you were a prostitute. Yet Christianity comes along, and when Paul said what he said, Christianity is the first religion, it was the first philosophy, it was the first thought system that ever lifted up long-term singleness for an adult and said, "This is a perfectly good way to be." That was absolutely stunning.

Stanley Hauerwas, a scholar at Duke University, says one of the clearest differences between Christianity and all other religions was Christianity's idea of singleness as a paradigm way of life for its followers. Paul and Jesus both say some people will choose not to be married, and that's a good thing. This was revolutionary in ancient societies. The implications have seldom been appreciated. Since Jesus and Paul, it broke the absolute necessity of the family.

Now creating a family is not something we had to do. Christianity was absolutely amazingly unique in saying, "Sure, it's okay to be single." Rodney Stark (I mentioned him last week, did I not?) is a scholar who studied early Christianity. Listen to this. He says if Christian women became widowed, they enjoyed substantial advantages over those around them. Pagan widows faced great social pressure to remarry. Caesar Augustus had widows fined if they failed to marry within two years.

If you lost your husband and you didn't get married within two years, you got fined because single adulthood was absolutely illegitimate because there was no significance apart from family. There was no future apart from family. There was no security apart from family. Among Christians, says Rodney Stark, widowhood was highly respected. The church stood ready to sustain poor widows, allowing them a choice as to whether they wanted to marry again or not.

So on the one hand, what Paul was saying about singleness was amazing. On the other hand, I also said it was amazing then, but it's amazing now. Because do you know what Paul is saying? This is pretty astounding. Paul gives us the highest view of sex anyone ever had. Then he says it's quite all right to live your whole life without it. He is assuming, of course, that singles do not have sex.¹

Traditional society said, "Unless you have a spouse and a family, you can't possibly be a legitimate person." Modern society says, "Unless you have sex and romance and love, you can't possibly be fulfilled." Paul says, "Eh!" to both. This is astounding. This is not the traditional understanding you have to get married for social status. This is not the

¹ Timothy J. Keller, [The Timothy Keller Sermon Archive](#) (New York City: Redeemer Presbyterian Church, 2013).

*romantic, modern. He has a completely off-the-map, off-the-chart, off-the-radar approach to sexuality, much higher than any other view of sexuality we know of.*²

IVP:

7:1. *Now Paul responds to the position in their letter to him: “It is good not to touch [not ‘marry’—NIV, TEV] a woman.” Some members of the church may be following an idea common among many Greek thinkers: sex was fine as long as one did not get tied down with marriage (cf. 6:12–20). Others, whom Paul addresses here, are already married (7:2–5) and abstain from relations with their spouses. Paul says that it is too late to choose celibacy once one is married (cf. v. 5).³*

- introduction: they apparently had written a previous letter, which he is about to respond to
- good not to touch a woman...
 - the things brought up in this chapter may have to do with the persecution and hard times.
- In verse 2, Paul starts, “But because of immoralities...”
 - This immorality will be defined as the chapter goes on.
 - Their own wife and husband... Not several wives or several husbands.

² Timothy J. Keller, [The Timothy Keller Sermon Archive](#) (New York City: Redeemer Presbyterian Church, 2013).

NIV New International Version

TEV Today’s English Version

church ***Church.** The Greek term used in the New Testament reflects the terms often used in the Septuagint to translate the Hebrew word for the “congregation” (*qahal*) of Israel: “church” (assembly) and “synagogue” (gathering). Although some scholars have suggested that Jesus could not have spoken about the church during his earthly ministry, the Dead Sea Scrolls used the Hebrew term for God’s community; hence Jesus could use this word in talking about his future community (Mt 16:18; 18:17). The term was in common use in Greek culture for “assemblies,” especially citizen assemblies in cities. (The popular modern surmise that the Greek word for “church,” *ekklēsia*, means “called-out ones” is thus mistaken; that sense is actually more appropriate for “saints,” i.e., “those separated [for God].”)

³Keener, C. S., & InterVarsity Press. (1993). *The IVP Bible background commentary : New Testament* (1 Co 7:1). Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press.

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- IVP: “*Let each have*” reflects a Greek idiom for “*Let them have sexual relations.*” Jewish people saw married sexual intimacy as the best deterrent to sexual immorality, and Paul here agrees (see also Prov 5:19–20).⁴
- In verse 3, Paul starts talking about the sexual duty that spouses have to each other.
 - This I also see being defined as the chapter goes on.
- Verse 4: we must submit to each other.
 - 1 Timothy 4:8 about bodily discipline being less profitable than godliness
 - Ephesians 5:22-33
 - Eph 5:21: Every one submits to Christ
 - 1 Peter 3:1-7
- Verse 5: seems very emphatic: STOP!!!
- Notice: so that satan does not tempt
 - Because of your lack of self-control!

IVP:

7:3. Jewish marriage contracts stipulated a number of duties for the husband and a number for the wife; one major duty required of the husband was intercourse. Paul views intercourse as a mutual obligation; the meaning of “marital duty” (NIV) here is clear (cf. “conjugal rights”—NRSV).

7:4. Greek writers sometimes portrayed submitting to sexual relations or passion as bringing oneself under someone else’s control.

7:5. Jewish teachers who were trying to formulate laws in this period differed on how long a man could vow to abstain from intercourse with his wife; one school said two weeks, and the other school said one week. Although Paul would not make longer abstinence grounds for divorce, as they did (7:10–13), he clearly wishes to limit even abstinence by mutual consent, leaving the specifics to the couple. For “temptation” here see comment on 7:2, 9.⁵

1 Corinthians 7:6–11 (NASB95)

⁴Keener, C. S., & InterVarsity Press. (1993). *The IVP Bible background commentary : New Testament* (1 Co 7:2). Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press.

NIV New International Version

NRSV New Revised Standard Version

⁵Keener, C. S., & InterVarsity Press. (1993). *The IVP Bible background commentary : New Testament* (1 Co 7:3-5). Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press.

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- 6 *But this I say by way of concession, not of command.*
7 *Yet I wish that all men were even as I myself am. However, each man has his own gift from God, one in this manner, and another in that.*
8 *But I say to the unmarried and to widows that it is good for them if they remain even as I.*
9 *But if they do not have self-control, let them marry; for it is better to marry than to burn with passion.*
10 *But to the married I give instructions, not I, but the Lord, that the wife should not leave her husband*
11 *(but if she does leave, she must remain unmarried, or else be reconciled to her husband), and that the husband should not divorce his wife.*

- Not a command: This is just Paul acknowledging
- Paul wishes that all men were as he was??
 - Was Paul married?
 - It was common for Pharisees to be married
 - Verse 8 Paul talks to the married and the widows saying that it is good for them to remain as I.
 - Paul likely widower
- Verse 7: We all have gifts.
 - → Celibacy is a gift!
 - 1 Cor 9:5: believing wife as Cephas (Peter).
 - → Peter was an apostle and was married
- Matt 19:11f; Rom 12:6; 1 Cor 12:4, 11: all about spiritual gifts.
 - Matt 19:11 specific to being celibate
- Verse 9: 1 Timothy 5:14: young widows instructed to be remarried rather than give the devil a chance.
 - Better to be married than to sin sexually
- Verse 10: Paul appeals to Jesus teaching : Mal 2:16; Matt 5:32; 19:3–9; Mark 10:2–12; Luke 16:18⁶
 - This is not a quote but an interpretation of what the Lord said.
 - Mal 2:16: God hates divorce

⁶*New American Standard Bible : 1995 update.* 1995 (Ge 1:1). LaHabra, CA: The Lockman Foundation.

- Matt 5:32: *any man who is divorced except for unfaithfulness makes the spouse commit adultery. Anyone who marries a divorced woman commits adultery*
- Verse 11: don't leave your spouse and don't marry another

Verses 12-16:

1 Corinthians 7:12–16 (NASB95)

- 12** *But to the rest I say, not the Lord, that if any brother has a wife who is an unbeliever, and she consents to live with him, he must not divorce her.*
- 13** *And a woman who has an unbelieving husband, and he consents to live with her, she must not send her husband away.*
- 14** *For the unbelieving husband is sanctified through his wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified through her believing husband; for otherwise your children are unclean, but now they are holy.*
- 15** *Yet if the unbelieving one leaves, let him leave; the brother or the sister is not under bondage in such cases, but God has called us to peace.*
- 16** *For how do you know, O wife, whether you will save your husband? Or how do you know, O husband, whether you will save your wife?*

The Bible Knowledge Commentary:

7:12-13. The **rest** referred to Christians who were married to non-Christians. Jesus, in the course of His ministry, never had addressed this issue (cf. vv. 10, 25). But Paul, with no less authority (cf. v. 25) did. Some divorces may have been initiated because of the command of Ezra to the Israelites in Jerusalem after the Exile (Ezra 10:11) to divorce themselves from pagan spouses. Paul affirmed that the same principle should operate in a believer-unbeliever marriage as in a marriage of two Christians: as a rule, no divorce. A Christian husband **must not divorce** (**aphietō**) an unbelieving **wife**, and a Christian wife **must not divorce** (**aphietō**) a non-Christian **husband**.⁷

- Paul says this, not the Lord. Some will say that this means that what follows is his personal opinion without inspiration. I think this simply means that he is no longer quoting from Jesus.
- Don't divorce your spouse just because she is an unbeliever.
- Verse 13: same thing if a wife has an unbelieving husband...
- Verse 14: this is a hard verse to grasp: I think that it doesn't mean that the unbelieving spouse is saved by being with the believing spouse. I think that Paul is implying that the unbelieving spouse will see the goodness and Christianity in the believing spouse and be saved. The believing spouse can be a witness.

⁷Walvoord, J. F., Zuck, R. B., & Dallas Theological Seminary. (1983-c1985). *The Bible knowledge commentary : An exposition of the scriptures* (2:518). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

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- This is after you are already married. But still not to marry a non Christian (missionary dating) 2Cor 6:14
- The children are unclean if they are divorced. Divorce hurts children. This could also have to do with the children seeing the good witness in their parents and being saved later.
- Sanctified set apart: the unbelieving husband is set apart by his spouse
- see also Acts 16:31
- the influence of the jailer led to the family will be saved. In some cultures the people will believe based on the tribal leader, or a core leader or family leader. In the US it is not usually that way.
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- Verse 15: the believing spouse is not bound if the unbelieving spouse wants to leave.
 - I wonder if this was a problem in Corinth
 - I suspect it is likely given how pagan the area was. Especially if the believing spouse will no longer participate in the pagan practices
- Verse 16 proves that verse 14 can't mean that the spouse will definitely be saved by the believing spouse.
 - I suspect if might have been a problem with the believing spouse(s) trying to force the unbelieving to stay with them.

The Bible Knowledge Commentary:

7:16. *Paul then stated a second (cf. v. 14) and crucial reason why a Christian should stay married to a non-Christian. God might use the Christian mate as a channel of blessing (cf. v. 14), leading ultimately to the point where the unbelieving spouse would believe the message of the Cross and experience salvation (cf. 1 Peter 3:1-2).⁸*

IVP:

7:12–13. *In 7:12–16, Paul must address how Jesus' teaching relates to a specific situation; general statements of principle were regularly qualified for specific situations. What about the party divorced against his or her will? (Under Palestinian Jewish law, women could be divorced by a unilateral act of the husband; under Roman law, either party could divorce the other.) Because most first-generation Christians were converted after marriage (which was generally arranged by parents), this text is no indication that Christians knowingly chose marriages with pagans.*

7:14. *Both Greco-Roman and Jewish law debated the status of children of socially mixed unions; Jewish law also debated the status of children of religiously mixed unions. Here Paul argues that*

⁸Walvoord, J. F., Zuck, R. B., & Dallas Theological Seminary. (1983-c1985). *The Bible knowledge commentary : An exposition of the scriptures* (2:519). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

children of religiously mixed unions are within the sphere of gospel influence and cannot be used as an excuse for divorce. In Roman society, the children normally went to the father in the event of a divorce; a Christian wife involved in a divorce would lose her opportunity to influence her children for God.

7:15. *Paul addresses the specific situation not addressed in Jesus' general principle that he has just cited (7:10–11): the innocent party is free to remarry (see comment on 7:12–13). "Not under bondage" or "not bound" alludes to the wording of Jewish divorce documents, which told the woman, "You are free to remarry any man," and further applied to divorce the precise language of freedom from slavery. Being "bound" would mean that she was still married in God's sight; not being "bound," or being "free," meant that she was free to remarry.⁹*

Verses 17-40 with sub categories

Verses 17-20:

1 Corinthians 7:17–20 (NASB95)

- 17** *Only, as the Lord has assigned to each one, as God has called each, in this manner let him walk. And so I direct in all the churches.*
- 18** *Was any man called when he was already circumcised? He is not to become uncircumcised. Has anyone been called in uncircumcision? He is not to be circumcised.*
- 19** *Circumcision is nothing, and uncircumcision is nothing, but what matters is the keeping of the commandments of God.*
- 20** *Each man must remain in that condition in which he was called.*

IVP: 7:17. *Greek philosophers, especially Stoics, emphasized accepting one's situation. But whereas Stoics identified the God who directed their lives with Fate, Paul trusts God as a loving Father.¹⁰*

- It seems that in the following, Paul is trying to make the point that you don't have to be who you are not.
- Verses 18-19 are particularizing verse 17. Paul is going from the general to the specific

IVP: 7:18–20. *Greeks exercised in the nude, and both Greeks and Romans regarded circumcision as a mutilation. For several centuries some Jews, ashamed of their*

gospel **Gospel**. The term so translated means literally "good news"; it was the sort of good news heralds would bring, and in Isaiah it refers to the specific message of God's restoration and salvation for his people. ("Gospel" as a literary genre, a type of book in the New Testament, is different; on this sense of the term see the introduction to the Gospels.)

⁹Keener, C. S., & InterVarsity Press. (1993). *The IVP Bible background commentary : New Testament* (1 Co 7:12-15). Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press.

¹⁰Keener, C. S., & InterVarsity Press. (1993). *The IVP Bible background commentary : New Testament* (1 Co 7:17). Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press.

*circumcision in the predominantly Greek culture, had opted for a minor surgical operation that could pull the remains of their foreskin forward and make them appear uncircumcised.*¹¹

- If you are not circumcised you don't have to be.
 - Acts 15:1: some were teaching that you had to be circumcised
- Rom 2:27, 29; Gal 3:28; 5:6; 6:15; Col 3:11: Romans 2:29 is good. Circumcision doesn't mean anything. What matters is the heart following God.
- Verse 20 comes back to verse 16

Verses 21-24:

1 Corinthians 7:21–24 (NASB95)

- 21** *Were you called while a slave? Do not worry about it; but if you are able also to become free, rather do that.*
- 22** *For he who was called in the Lord while a slave, is the Lord's freedman; likewise he who was called while free, is Christ's slave.*
- 23** *You were bought with a price; do not become slaves of men.*
- 24** *Brethren, each one is to remain with God in that condition in which he was called.*

- These verses begin a particularization of verse 20. Paul is going from the general to the specific.
- If you were called as a slave you are free in Christ. If you do have the opportunity to be free, do so.
- Those called while free are slaves to Christ.
 - Philemon
- Verse 23: you were bought with a price:
 - →I see Paul saying, "if you are not slaves, or were not when saved, don't become slaves." Bought with a price is redemption. Christ death on the cross
- Verse 24: is a summary/generalization
 - Paul goes from the particular to the general. This is repeated

Verses 25-31: Verses 25-28 is specific, and I see verses 29-31 as an aside. A lot of repetition and particularizing in these verses

1 Corinthians 7:25–31 (NASB95)

- 25** *Now concerning virgins I have no command of the Lord, but I give an opinion as one who by the mercy of the Lord is trustworthy.*
- 26** *I think then that this is good in view of the present distress, that it is good for a man to remain as he is.*

¹¹Keener, C. S., & InterVarsity Press. (1993). *The IVP Bible background commentary : New Testament* (1 Co 7:18). Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press.

- 27 Are you bound to a wife? Do not seek to be released. Are you released from a wife? Do not seek a wife.
- 28 But if you marry, you have not sinned; and if a virgin marries, she has not sinned. Yet such will have trouble in this life, and I am trying to spare you.
- 29 But this I say, brethren, the time has been shortened, so that from now on those who have wives should be as though they had none;
- 30 and those who weep, as though they did not weep; and those who rejoice, as though they did not rejoice; and those who buy, as though they did not possess;
- 31 and those who use the world, as though they did not make full use of it; for the form of this world is passing away.

IVP: 7:25. *The term translated “virgin” here was usually used for women, who were also the only ones expected to avoid premarital sex in Greco-Roman culture (outside Judaism). Paul seems to apply the term to both men and women, as do a few later writers.*

7:26. *Many Jewish people expected a time of great suffering just before the end of the world; in that time, marriage and procreation would be of little value. In other periods of great suffering, when one was liable to be bereaved of spouse and children, the same principle applied (e.g., Jer 16:2; this was not the norm—cf. Jer 29:6).¹²*

The Bible Knowledge Commentary:

7:26-28. *The present crisis may have referred to persecution then being suffered by the Corinthians (cf. John 16:33; 2 Tim. 3:12; 1 Peter 4:12) or to an experience of suffering which Paul anticipated would shortly befall them (in which case the words could be trans. “impending crisis”). In view of his silence in the letter about any present suffering on their part the latter point of view (and trans.) is preferred. (Cf. 1 Cor. 4:8 which intimates a perceived state of well-being or even positive euphoria.) Still, when persecution came, as Paul felt it surely would, its onslaught could be handled more ably by single than by married persons. However fearsome the thought of martyrdom (cf. 13:3) might be to a single person, it was doubly so to a married person responsible for a spouse and children. With these conditions in view marriage would not be wrong (**if you do marry, you have not sinned**), but it would be inexpedient.¹³*

- Paul has no quote from the Lord and in this case may be at a loss from authoritative inspiration
 - Lit: “as one who has had mercy shown to him by the Lord to be trustworthy”
 - Likely Paul claiming is status as an apostle
- A virgin is an unmarried daughter.

¹²Keener, C. S., & InterVarsity Press. (1993). *The IVP Bible background commentary : New Testament* (1 Co 7:25-26). Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press.

¹³Walvoord, J. F., Zuck, R. B., & Dallas Theological Seminary. (1983-c1985). *The Bible knowledge commentary : An exposition of the scriptures* (2:519). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

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- This likely is referring to the father finding a spouse for his daughter or dedicating his daughter to celibacy
- Verse 26: present distress: likely persecution or persecution to come
 - Once again: remain as you are. If you are unmarried stay unmarried. Now Paul talks to the men.
- Verse 27: self-explanatory: stay the same
- Verse 28: not a sin to be married but you will have trouble.
 - Trouble: a double commitment
 - Have to provide
 - Maybe persecution that will cause separation
- **Verses 29-31 about the time being shortened:**
 - Again, I can see this talking about the end times but also maybe the persecution to come.
 - Great persecution under Nero in the mid to late A.D. 60's
- Verse 30: simply repeated ideas
- Verse 31 and 1 John 2:17: the world is passing away
 - →don't be so used to this world

Verses 32-35: fully committed to the Lord: continuing contrast with married and unmarried

1 Corinthians 7:32–35 (NASB95)

- 32** *But I want you to be free from concern. One who is unmarried is concerned about the things of the Lord, how he may please the Lord;*
- 33** *but one who is married is concerned about the things of the world, how he may please his wife,*
- 34** *and his interests are divided. The woman who is unmarried, and the virgin, is concerned about the things of the Lord, that she may be holy both in body and spirit; but one who is married is concerned about the things of the world, how she may please her husband.*
- 35** *This I say for your own benefit; not to put a restraint upon you, but to promote what is appropriate and to secure undistracted devotion to the Lord.*

- Verse 32 and 1 Tim 5:5: full commitment to the Lord because of no family
- Verse 33: contrast with the married man who has a commitment to spouse
- Verse 34: continuing contrast

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- Verse 35: Paul wants to tell them this not to restrain them but for their benefit
 - He may have 1st hand experience with both: serving the Lord with and without a spouse

Verses 36-40:

1 Corinthians 7:36–40 (NASB95)

- 36** *But if any man thinks that he is acting unbecomingly toward his virgin daughter, if she is past her youth, and if it must be so, let him do what he wishes, he does not sin; let her marry.*
- 37** *But he who stands firm in his heart, being under no constraint, but has authority over his own will, and has decided this in his own heart, to keep his own virgin daughter, he will do well.*
- 38** *So then both he who gives his own virgin daughter in marriage does well, and he who does not give her in marriage will do better.*
- 39** *A wife is bound as long as her husband lives; but if her husband is dead, she is free to be married to whom she wishes, only in the Lord.*
- 40** *But in my opinion she is happier if she remains as she is; and I think that I also have the Spirit of God.*

- If your daughter is passed her youth: let her marry. It is ok
- Verse 37: it is ok to commit your daughter to celibacy as well
- Verse 38: the two contrasting verses are put together
- Romans 7:2 goes along with verse 39
- Notice the end of verse 39: goes along with 2 Cor 6:14. If a spouse dies you can remarry but only in the Lord. Make sure they are Christians
 - There are a lot of problems from not marrying a Christians. The church ignores this too much
- Verse 40 a summary and conclusion
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IVP:

- **7:36–38.** *Scholars debate whether this passage addresses the fathers of virgins (see NASB) or their fiancés (see NIV, NRSV, TEV); evidence within the text can be read either*

NASB New American Standard Bible

NIV New International Version

NRSV New Revised Standard Version

TEV Today's English Version

way. Parents arranged their children's marriages, usually with some input from the children; the father had the greatest measure of authority in the matter. "Full age" (7:36—NASB) could mean midteens (parental arrangement of marriages allowed couples to wed at a younger age than in our culture); but the term normally means "beyond youth" and hence probably refers to a virgin older than usual. There is no evidence in this period for unconsummated "spiritual engagements," which became common in later Christianity, perhaps through the "fiancé" reading of this passage.¹⁴

¹⁴Keener, C. S., & InterVarsity Press. (1993). *The IVP Bible background commentary : New Testament* (1 Co 7:36). Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press.