

The Use, Meaning and Theological Significance of the Proposition ἐν, in ἐν τῇ γυναίκῃ in 1 Corinthians 7:12-16.

Mayboy Muchabwe
Adventist University of Africa, Kenya

Abstract

There are divergent views on ἐν τῇ γυναίκῃ as reflected in many Bible versions. However, the study thesis is that it expresses personal relationships; hence, the meaning “to unite to his wife” is the probable rendition. The syntactical relationship between the phrase and ἠγάσται suggests the use of an indirect middle voice rather than a passive one. For this reason, the study concludes that taking the phrase in its historical, literary, semantic, and syntactic context, the verse’s probable meaning should be: because the unbelieving husband has devoted (in his own self-interest) to (unite to/belong to) his wife and the unbelieving wife has devoted (in her own self-interest) to (unite to/belong to) her husband: otherwise, then your children were illegitimate (impure), but now they are pure (legitimate).

Keywords: Unbelieving Husband, Believing Wife, Dedicated, Legitimate

Introduction

1 Corinthians 7:12-14 poses a theological ambiguity,¹ and scholarly disagreements with regards to the semantic nuances of the Greek preposition ἐν,² which affects its syntactical meaning in the prepositional phrase ἐν τῇ γυναίκῃ in verse 14.

Consequently, four divergent interpretations of 1 Corinthians 7:14 abound. The first view interprets the prepositional phrase ἐν

¹ Archibald T. Robertson, *Word Pictures in New Testament*, vol. 5 [CD ROM] (Oak Harbor: Logos Research System, 1997).

² Gerald L. Stevens, *New Testament Greek*, Accordance electronic edition (New York, NY: University Press of America, 1997), 95.

τῆ ἡ γυναίκα as “by the wife.”³ This view attests that ἐν τῆ ἡ γυναίκα conveys the idea of means.⁴

This view postulates that the “unbelieving partner in some sense is sanctified by the believing wife.”⁵ This sense is evident in King James’ version of the Bible.⁶

The second position states that the phrase means “through his wife.”⁷ This usage is present in the New American Standard Bible.⁸ This view sees agency as the sense in the prepositional phrase ἐν τῆ ἡ γυναίκα.⁹

The third approach prefers “because of his wife.”¹⁰ Advocates see a causal sense in the prepositional phrase ἐν τῆ ἡ γυναίκα.¹¹ This position has support from the translators of the English Standard version.¹²

The fourth view attests that the phrase means “in the wife,”¹³ which has been maintained by translators of the World English

³ Ronald Trail, *1 Corinthians*, An Exegetical Summary of 1Corinthians 1-9: Exegetical Summary Series (ESS), 30 vols. (Dallas, TX: SIL International, 1995), 268.

⁴ Robert Shaw, *The Reformed Faith: An Exposition of the Westminster Confession of Faith*, Accordance electronic ed. (Altamonte Springs, FL: OakTree Software, 2001), para. 892.

⁵ Lawrence O. Richards, *New International Encyclopedia of Bible Words* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1991), s.v. “Family.”

⁶ *The Holy Bible King James Version (KJV)*, Containing the Old and New Testaments (London, EN: Robert Barker, 1611).

⁷ Ronald Trail, *1 Corinthians*, An Exegetical Summary of 1Corinthians 1-9: Exegetical Summary Series (ESS), 30 vols. (Dallas, TX: SIL International, 1995), 268.

⁸ *The New American Standard Bible (NAS)* (La Habra, CA: The Lockman Foundation, 1988), BibleWorks, v.9.

⁹ Steven C. Barton, *Dictionary of the New Testament Backgrounds (DNTB)* (2000), s.v. “Social Values and Structures.”

¹⁰ Trail, *1 Corinthians*, An Exegetical Summary of 1Corinthians 1-9, 268.

¹¹ Verlyn D. Verbrugge, ed. *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology-Abridged (NIDNTT-A)*, Accordance electronic edition (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2000), s.v. “ἐν.”

¹² *The Holy Bible, English Standard Version (ESV)* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2007), BibleWorks, v.9.

¹³ Trail, *1 Corinthians*, An Exegetical Summary of 1Corinthians, 268.

Bible.¹⁴ R. C. H. Lenski holds that the idea here is that ἐν τῇ γυναικί connotes “in the person of the wife.”¹⁵

The lack of consensus on the meaning of ἐν τῇ γυναικί prompts the justification for further study of the text to determine its theological implication.

The purpose of the research is to evaluate the views and establish the probable meaning and theological significance of the prepositional phrase ἐν τῇ γυναικί in 1 Corinthians 7:14, in relation to its section vv12-16 in the unit (1 Cor 7:1-40). To arrive at the desired conclusion, this research pursues an exegetical approach based on the historical-grammatical method by analyzing the contextual, formal, semantic, and syntactic literary contexts. Therefore, this study addresses two key questions. (1) How does contextual and formal analysis help in understanding the meaning of the text? (2) What is the semantic and syntactic meaning of the preposition ἐν in the phrase under discussion? The results of the study are meant to help with correct biblical interpretation and to understand the text among Bible scholars, translators, and ordinary Bible readers. The study’s focus is the section encompassing verses 12-16 regarding mixed marriages in the unit 1 Corinthians 7:1-40. To answer the first question, this study turns to a contextual analysis.

Contextual Analysis

To deduce the theological meaning of 1 Corinthians 7:12-16, this section surveys contextual issues. The historical and literary contexts are discussed in this section, as both help clarify the meaning of the text.

¹⁴ *World English Bible (WEB)*, trans. Michael Paul Johnson (Austin, TX: Rainbow Missions, 1997).

¹⁵ Robert C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Paul’s First Epistle to the Corinthians*, Lenski’s Commentary on the New Testament, Accordance electronic ed. (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1961), 292.

Historical Context of the Corinthian Church

Understanding the historical setting of the times results in a better appreciation of Paul's use and the meaning of the prepositional phrase in the text. The case in point is the social background.

Social Background of Corinth

The first century Roman Corinth was a city with a mixed population of Romans and Greeks¹⁶ and few Jews¹⁷ and the Church would not be exceptional. The mention of Jewish believers such as Aquilla, Priscilla, and Crispus (Acts 18:1-2, 8); along with Latin names like Gaius (1 Cor 1:14),¹⁸ Titius Justus (Acts 8:7)¹⁹ and Greek names like Erastus affirms this fact (Rom 16:23).²⁰

Furthermore, this paper observes that since the subjects of the text in 1 Corinthians 7:12-16 are both husband and wife, the first century Roman law on marriage may be in view. J. R. McRay also attests that the first-century Roman Corinth in her civic and religious laws had a tilt towards Roman than Greek Laws.²¹ Roman law availed both husbands and wives equal rights to initiate divorce.²² Everett Ferguson also affirms that while divorce in the Jewish customs was a privilege for men, in the Greco-Roman world both parties had the liberty to divorce, either by an "oral notice or written notice."²³ Similarly, Ferguson adds that marriages in the

¹⁶ Archibald Robertson, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the First Epistle of St. Paul to the Corinthians*, eds. Samuel Rolles Driver, Alfred Plummer, and Charles A. Briggs, Accordance electronic ed. (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1911), para.19283.

¹⁷ John R. McRay, *Dictionary of New Testament Background (DNTB)*, ed. Craig A. Evans and Stanley E. Porter (Madison, WI: InterVarsity Christian Fellowship, 2000), s.v. "Corinth."

¹⁸ Horst R. Balz, "Γάιος," *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament (EDNT)*, ed. Horst Balz and Gerhard Schneider (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1990) 1:232.

¹⁹ John Rutherford, "Titus or Titius Justus," *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia (ISBE)*, ed. James Orr, Accordance Electronic edition (London, EN: Wm B. Eerdmans, 2015), "para. 57836.

²⁰ Roman Heiligenthal, "Εραστός," *EDNT*, 2:48.

²¹ J. R. McRay, *DNTB*, s.v. "Corinth."

²² Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Paul's First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 287.

²³ Everett Ferguson, *Backgrounds of Early Christianity*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2003), 75.

first century Corinth were contracted by mutual consent.²⁴ Jack J. Gibson points out that in Roman Corinth marriage laws, mutual consent by both parents of the couple commenced the marriage; conversely the withdrawal of consent unilaterally by either spouse revoked the marriage.²⁵

John H. Walton and Craig S. Keener share Gibson's views.²⁶ In like manner, Don Fleming adds that divorce happened when there was no mutual willingness to continue.²⁷

On this account, this research points out that the social setting and marriage laws of Roman Corinth could be in view.

The explicit use of the verbal expression *συνευδοκεῖ οἰκεῖν* (he/she consents to continue living together) set the condition for continuity of marriage and applied to both the unbelieving wife or husband (vv 12-13). Self-consent entails the involvement of personal interests. For this reason, the use of the middle voice in the construction, *ἡγίασται γὰρ ὁ ἀνὴρ ὁ ἄπιστος ἐν τῇ γυναικί* (because the unbelieving husband has/is devoted, in his own self-interest, to unite to/to belong to his wife) seems an appropriate rendition in verse 14 as opposed to the passive voice. The double prohibition against divorce would be applicable to both ethnic groups (Jews and Greco-Romans), as divorce was common and easy.²⁸ Merrill F. Unger as well confirms that marriages and divorces were contracted or disturbed by mutual consent and for the mutual good.²⁹ Having looked at the social setting, this study explores the literary setting.

²⁴ Ferguson, *Backgrounds of Early Christianity*, 74.

²⁵ Jack J. Gibson, "Ephesians 5:21-33 And the Lack of Marital Unity in the Roman Empire," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 168, no. 670 (April-June 2011): 166-167.

²⁶ John H. Walton and Craig S. Keener, eds. *NIV Cultural Backgrounds Study Bible*, Accordance electronic ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2016), para. 14905.

²⁷ Don Fleming, *Concise Bible Dictionary: Clear, Simple, and Easy to Understand* (Chattanooga, TN: AMG Publishers, 2004), s.v. "Divorce."

²⁸ W. Harold Mare, *New Testament Background Commentary* (Fearn, Ross-shire: Christian Focus Publications, 2004), 262.

²⁹ Merrill F. Unger, *The New Unger's Bible Dictionary* (Chicago, IL: The Moody Bible Institute of Chicago, 1988), 820.

Literary Context of the Unit 1 Cor 7:1-40

The study observes that the larger unit 1 Corinthians 7:1-40 deals with marriage, celibacy, and divorce questions.³⁰ It is set between Paul's counsels to believers against sexual immorality in 1 Corinthians 6:12-20. It precedes the unit with counsels regarding food given to idols, starting in Chapter 8:1.

The unit limits are set using the Greek phrase *περὶ δε* (1 Cor 7:1, 7:25; 8:1).³¹ To chat the storyline of the section on mixed marriages under study in 1 Corinthians 7:12-16, its literary structure in relation to the unit follows.

Literary Structure of 1 Cor 7:12-16 in Its Unit

The study observes that the literary structure of 1 Cor 7:12-16 in its larger literary unit starts with the guidance on celibacy and sexual abstinence in marriage vv 1-6,³² marked by *περὶ δὲ* (1 Cor 7:1). Then the storyline moves to Paul's guidance to the unmarried and widows marked by the transition *λέγω δὲ τοῖς ἀγάμοις* 7:8-9. The story flow moves to the commands of no divorce between believing couples marked by the transition *τοῖς δὲ γεγαμηκόσιν* 10-11. Then the storyline continues to the command for no divorce in mixed marriages marked by *τοῖς δὲ λοιποῖς* vv 12-13. Verses 14-16 serves as an explanation or reason against and for divorce evidenced by the coordinating conjunction *γάρ*.³³ The next section deals with counsel to believers to maintain their ethnic identity vv 17-24. The last section in the unit returns to the marriage instructions regarding those engaged, the single, and the widowed vv 25-40.

³⁰ Frederick F. Bruce, *The New International Dictionary of the Christian Church (NIDCC)*, ed. J. D. Douglas and Earle E. Cairns (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan 1978), s.v. "Pauline Epistles."

³¹ R. Dykes Shaw, "First Epistle to the Corinthians," *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia, (ISBE)*, ed. James Orr (London, EN: Wm B. Eerdmans, 2015), para. 14020.

³² Robert C.H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Paul's First Epistle to the Corinthians*, Lenski's Commentary on the New Testament, Accordance electronic ed. (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1961), 275-276.

³³ Joseph Thayer, *Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, Accordance electronic edition (N.P.: Baker Book House, 1977), s.v. "γάρ."

Joel B. Green notes that verses 12-14 is a continuation on the marriage commands³⁴ given in verses 10-11, where Paul admonished couples who are both believers not to divorce. The conjunction γὰρ in the expression ἡγίασται γὰρ in verse 14 can either serve as explanatory³⁵ or causal³⁶ hence, explaining the reason for not divorcing.

The research notes that the prohibition against divorce is based on the clauses εἴ...συνευδοκεῖ οἰκεῖν μετ' αὐτοῦ (if she agrees to continue living with him), or συνευδοκεῖ οἰκεῖν μετ' αὐτῆς (if he agrees to continue living with her) in verses 12-13.³⁷

For this reason, the construction “ἡγίασται γὰρ ὁ ἀνὴρ ὁ ἄπιστος ἐν τῇ γυναικί,” should be understood as the reason for not divorcing and not as benefits or results for not divorcing the unbelieving husband or wife, the reason being the fulfilment of the condition (συνευδοκεῖ οἰκεῖν μετ' αὐτῆς) by the unbelieving partner consenting to continue in marriage vv12-13. In this case the prepositional phrase ἐν τῇ γυναικί appears to convey personal relationship.³⁸

Thus, this study suggests that the prepositional phrase ἐν τῇ γυναικί may be rendered as “to belong to or to unite to his wife.” On this account, the research submits that the literary structure context affirms that the phrase ἐν τῇ γυναικί is a marker of personal relationship. The role of formal analysis follows next.

Formal Analysis

Having a clear understanding of the form of the unit is helpful in interpreting the meaning of the text.

³⁴ Joel B. Green, et al, *Dictionary of Scriptures and Ethics* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Publishing Group, 2011), 510.

³⁵ Steven LoVullo, Brian Baxter, Rodney Decker, *Diagram of Greek New Testament*, ed. Rex A. Koivisto Accordance electronic edition [CD ROM] (Portland, OR: Multnomah University, 2019).

³⁶ Joseph Thayer, Thayer's *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, s.v. “γὰρ.”

³⁷ Richard L. Pratt Jr., *I & II Corinthians*, vol. 7 of Holman New Testament Commentary, Accordance electronic ed. (Nashville: B & H Publishing Group, 2000), 116.

³⁸ Murray J. Harris, *Prepositions and Theology in the Greek New Testament*, Accordance electronic ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2012), 129.

Literary Form

Leyland advocates that the book form is an occasional letter, while the form of the unit suggests commands³⁹ or exhortations (verses 12-16)⁴⁰ due to the use of the imperative mood⁴¹ within an admonishment.⁴²

The implication is that it was an address to a specific situation that occasioned it, as 7:1 indicates.

Therefore, this study postulates that the verse under consideration (7:14) is an explanation or gives a reason for the commands not to divorce when one agrees to continue in marriage. The causal conjunction γὰρ⁴³ is indicative of this sense. In this regard, this research affirms that the prepositional phrase indicates personal relationships. A detailed synthesis and analysis are provided below.

Semantical and Syntactical Linguistic Analysis

To establish the meaning of the prepositional phrase ἐν τῇ γυναικί in 1 Corinthians 7:14 in relation to its unit vv12-16, this section offers a detailed analysis on words, phrases, clauses, sentence and unit. The following words ἐν, γὰρ, ἡγίασται, and ἀκάθαρτά and their meanings are a case in point.

Word Study

The first word to be analyzed is the preposition ἐν. The fact that it has various nuances affecting its meaning necessitates the need to study it to establish its use in the text.

³⁹ Leyland Ryken, *Letters of Grace and Beauty: A Guided Literary Study of New Testament Epistles, Reading the Bible as Literature*, Accordance electronic edition (Wooster, OH: Weaver Book Company, 2016), 34.

⁴⁰ Green, *Dictionary of Scriptures and Ethics*, 510.

⁴¹ Stevens, *New Testament Greek*, 343.

⁴² Hebert W. Bateman IV, *Interpreting the General Letters: An Exegetical Handbook*, ed. John D. Harvey, Handbooks for New Testament Exegesis, Accordance edition (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 2013), 39.

⁴³ Joseph H. Thayer, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, s.v. “γὰρ.”

The Function of ἐν

The preposition can express time of an action, where it can mean “at, during, or in the course of.”⁴⁴ It can express means or instrument by which an action is accomplished, hence, translated as “by, with.”⁴⁵

It can express position or location or state in which something is, carrying a sense of “in or within, among.”⁴⁶ The preposition can express cause for an action “because of, on account of, or to express respect-with respect to.”⁴⁷ It can as well express personal interest in something for someone hence translated as “to or for.”⁴⁸

While other scholars favour the other senses as the introduction shows, the study notes that in line with the syntax of the phrase ἐν τῇ γυναίκε, the construction ἐν+dative may convey personal relationship.⁴⁹ On this basis, the preposition’s sense would be “to (unite/belong to) his wife”⁵⁰ in the translation of ἐν τῇ γυναίκε. The role of the conjunction γὰρ is presented as follows:

The Function of Γὰρ

The use of γὰρ at the beginning of the clause in verse 14, is critical to the understanding of the meaning of the phrase ἐν τῇ γυναίκε in the unit under study. The presence of the conjunction γὰρ (for, because) implies reference to the previous line of thought.⁵¹ It also

⁴⁴ William D. Mounce, *The Analytical Lexicon: To the Greek New Testament*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1993), s.v. “ἐν.”

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ James Strong, *The New Strong’s Expanded Dictionary of Bible Words* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2001), s.v. “ἐν.”

⁴⁷ Friedrich Blass, Albert Debrunner and Robert W. Funk, *A Greek Grammar of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1961), 105.

⁴⁸ Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics: An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament*, 144.

⁴⁹ Harris, *Prepositions and Theology in the Greek New Testament*, 129.

⁵⁰ Translation mine

⁵¹ Robert L. Thomas, *Greek Dictionary of the New American Standard Exhaustive Concordance*, Accordance electronic edition [CD ROM] (N.P.: OakTree Software, 2020).

serves as a consecutively coordinating conjunction.⁵² Therefore, this research asserts that the force of the conjunction γὰρ in verse 14 is both explanatory and causal.⁵³ It assigns the reason for the prohibition of divorce in verses 12-13,⁵⁴ due to the self-consent of the unbelieving partner who sets himself/herself apart to unite to/belong to the believing partner.

On the other hand, when the unbelieving partner intends to leave in his/her own self-interest, divorce is allowed to occur in v15.⁵⁵ This research suggests that the causal aspect in γὰρ takes the sense of because⁵⁶ making the translation of ἡγίασται γὰρ ὁ ἀνήρ ὁ ἄπιστος ἐν τῇ γυναικὶ as “because he has/is devoted (in his own self-interest) to unite to or belong to his wife,” indicative of personal relationship.⁵⁷ Thus, the γὰρ in verse 16 equally is causal giving the reason the believer should not force the unbeliever who out of personal choice wants to divorce in verse 15.⁵⁸ The reason is the unbelieving partner’s wishing to separate in his/her own self-interest which captures the indirect middle voice use in verse 15.⁵⁹ Another reason is the uncertainty of the mixed marriage guaranteeing salvation to the unbeliever in verse 16.⁶⁰ The meaning of ἡγίασται follows the study of words.

⁵² Archibald T. Robertson, *A Grammar of the Greek New Testament in the Light of Historical Research*, Accordance electronic edition, (New York, NY: Hodder and Stoughton, 1919), 1189.

⁵³ Karl-Heinz Pridik, “γὰρ,» *EDNT*, 1:238-239.

⁵⁴ Henry G. Liddell, and Robert Scott, *Greek-English Lexicon*, rev. Roderick McKenzie and Henry S. Jones, Accordance electronic edition (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1953), s.v. “γάρ.”

⁵⁵ Lawrence O Richards, *New International Encyclopedia of Bible Words* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1991), s.v. “Divorce and Remarriage.”

⁵⁶ Thayer, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, s.v. “γάρ.”

⁵⁷ Harris, *Prepositions and Theology in the Greek New Testament*, 129.

⁵⁸ Robert G. Olender, “The Pauline Privilege: Inference or Exegesis?” *Faith and Mission* 16, no. 1 (Fall 1998): 108-109.

⁵⁹ Barclay M. Newman and Eugene A. Nida, *A Translator’s Handbook on Paul’s First Letter to the Corinthians*, UBS Translator’s Handbooks, 2nd ed. Accordance electronic edition (New York, NY: United Bible Societies, 1994), para. 37794.

⁶⁰ Craig S. Keener, *The IVP Bible Backgrounds Commentary: New Testament*, 2nd ed., Accordance electronic ed. (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2014), 474.

The Meaning of ἡγίασται

The word ἡγίασται can mean, “to consecrate, or cleanse.”⁶¹ It can also mean, “to be devoted, set apart, or make holy.”⁶² It equally has the meaning of “to sanctify or purify.”⁶³

It also means to dedicate.⁶⁴ However, this analysis favours the sense of devote or set apart as the meaning of ἡγίασται when viewed in the indirect middle voice (he has/is devoted in his own self-interest).

While other scholars favour the passive voice in ἡγίασται (he is sanctified, consecrated),⁶⁵ the research favours the indirect middle voice due to the subjects (unbelieving partners) acting with self-interest⁶⁶ in the section under review.

The study notes a logical thought flow that would favour middle voice use from vv12-16, as the text below shows:

- 1 Corinthians 7:12a ... εἴ τις ἀδελφὸς γυναῖκα ἔχει ἄπιστον
 12b καὶ αὕτη συνευδοκεῖ οἰκεῖν μετ’ αὐτοῦ, μὴ ἀφιέτω αὐτήν·
 13a καὶ γυνὴ εἴ τις ἔχει ἄνδρα ἄπιστον
 13b καὶ οὗτος συνευδοκεῖ οἰκεῖν μετ’ αὐτῆς, μὴ ἀφιέτω τὸν ἄνδρα.
 14a ἡγίασται γὰρ ὁ ἀνὴρ ὁ ἄπιστος ἐν τῇ γυναικί
 14b καὶ ἡγίασται ἡ γυνὴ ἡ ἄπιστος ἐν τῷ ἀδελφῷ·
 14c ἐπεὶ ἄρα τὰ τέκνα ὑμῶν ἀκάθαρτά ἐστιν, νῦν δὲ ἁγιά
 ἐστιν
 15a εἰ δὲ ὁ ἄπιστος χωρίζεται, χωριζέσθω·

⁶¹ Mounce, *The Analytical Lexicon: To the Greek New Testament*, s.v. “ἡγίασται.”

⁶² Strong, s.v. “ἡγίασται.”

⁶³ Spiros Zodhiates ed., *The Complete Word Study Dictionary: New Testament* (Chattanooga, TN: AMG Publishers, 1992), s.v. “ἡγίασται.”

⁶⁴ Robert Beekes, *Etymological Dictionary of Greek (EDG)*, (Leiden, SH: Brill, 2009), s.v. “ἅγιος.”

⁶⁵ Trail, *1 Corinthians, An Exegetical Summary of 1 Corinthians 1-9: Exegetical Summary Series*, 268.

⁶⁶ Stevens, *New Testament Greek*, 24-25.

15b οὐ δεδούλωται ὁ ἀδελφὸς ἢ ἡ ἀδελφή ἐν τοῖς τοιούτοις·
ἐν δὲ εἰρήνῃ κέκληκεν ὑμᾶς ὁ θεός.

16 τί γὰρ οἶδας, γύναι, εἰ τὸν ἄνδρα σώσεις; ἢ τί οἶδας, ἄνερ,
εἰ τὴν γυναῖκα σώσεις;

Verse 12a and 12b have double subjects: the believing brother (ἀδελφός), and the unbelieving wife (αὕτη). However, the condition to not divorce lies with the action of the unbelieving wife if she agrees to continue living with the believing brother. Verse 13a and 13b also have double subjects of the believing wife (γυνή) and unbelieving husband (substantial οὗτος). Similarly, the condition to not divorce lies with the unbelieving husband agreeing to continue living with her. Verse 14a and 14b has a single category of subjects, that is, the unbelieving husband (ὁ ἀνὴρ ὁ ἄπιστος) and unbelieving wife (ἡ γυνὴ ἡ ἄπιστος), with 15a dealing with the generic unbelieving partner (ὁ ἄπιστος). For this reason, verse 14 gives the logical reason for not divorcing the unbelieving partner because the subject (husband or wife) has/is devoted in her/his own self-interest to unite to/belong to his/her partner.

Furthermore, the immediate conditional clause: εἰ δὲ ὁ ἄπιστος χωρίζεται, χωριζέσθω in verse 15a, allows for divorce based on the unbeliever initiating the divorce.

The use of the indirect middle voice in the verbs χωρίζεται (present indicative middle voice) and χωριζέσθω (present middle imperative)⁶⁷ in verse 15a reflects self-interest (indirect middle)⁶⁸ on the part of the unbeliever. Thus, the clause εἰ δὲ ὁ ἄπιστος χωρίζεται, χωριζέσθω would mean “but if the unbelieving [one] leaves in his/her own self-interest, let him/her leave verse 15. This literary context shows that the command not to divorce in verses 12-13, and to allow divorce in verse 15a logically depends on the actions of the unbeliever. Thus, verse 14 confirms the pattern of thought in favour of the indirect middle voice in the verb ἡγίασται. This

⁶⁷ Robert C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Paul's First Epistle to the Corinthians*, Lenski's Commentary on the New Testament, Accordance electronic ed. (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1961), 294.

⁶⁸ Matthew S. DeMoss, *Pocket Dictionary for the Study of New Testament Greek*, Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2001), s.v. “Indirect middle voice.”

explains the reason for negating divorce based on the unbeliever's willingness to devote in his/her own self-interest to unite/belong to his/her partner in marriage. Additionally, this study observes that the uncertainty of salvation on the part of the unbelieving partner by means of union with a believing partner affirms that sanctification in the sense of passive voice may not be in view (v16). Therefore, instrumental (by, through),⁶⁹ and locative (in) datives may be remote.

In addition, Horst Balz notes that when ἀγιάζω takes a passive voice, God is the subject (divine passive);⁷⁰ yet, in the unit, the unbelieving partners are the subject. The literary constructions αὐτή συνευδοκεῖ (she herself agrees), and οὗτος συνευδοκεῖ (he himself agrees) in vv 12-13, and the focus on the unbelieving ones in verse 14, suggest that the author's emphasis is on the unbelieving partners' actions. Dana M. Harris adds that the middle voice puts emphasis on the actor,⁷¹ and this analysis upholds this sense.

Therefore, ἡγίασται in v14 is more appropriate in an indirect middle voice, which therefore agrees to the sense of the personal relationship in the phrase ἐν τῇ γυναικί-to unite/belong to her wife. Furthermore, the study suggests that the use of the middle voice is in line with both the literary context in verses 12-13, in which self-consent (συνευδοκεῖ οἰκεῖν μετ' αὐτῆς) determined continuity in a marriage contract and the mutual consent needed to remain in marriage in the social setting of Roman Corinth as already noted earlier in this study. R. B. Kuiper also refutes the sense of the passive voice in ἡγίασται.⁷² Other scholars share a similar

⁶⁹ William D. Mounce, *Biblical Greek: A Compact Guide*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2019), 28.

⁷⁰ Horst Balz, "ἀγιάζω," *EDNT*,1:17.

⁷¹ Dana M. Harris, *An Introduction to Biblical Greek Grammar: Elementary Syntax and Linguistics*, Accordance electronic ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2020), 49.

⁷² R. B. Kuiper, "Reviews of Books," *Westminster Theological Journal* 4, no. 2 (May 1942): 157.

preference for the middle voice in verse 14.⁷³ After looking at the sense of ἡγίασαι, the study turns to the meaning of ἀκάθαρτά.

The Meaning of Ἀκάθαρτά

Ἀκάθαρτά is another key word worth studying to know its meaning in the unit under discussion. It has a variety of senses; hence, it is necessary to know the appropriate sense in the text. The word can mean, “physical uncleanness, ritual uncleanness, inward cleanliness and ethical cleanliness.”⁷⁴ Other meanings are, “defiled, or impure, or born outside a Christian bond.”⁷⁵

Furthermore, the study attests that marriages in the first century Corinth were officially registered with the state for the legitimisation of children, as children born outside marriage were considered illegitimate in the community.⁷⁶ On this basis, this research prefers a sense of impure or born outside Christian marriage as an implication in the verb under study.

In Jewish culture, the transfer of possessions to perfect and legitimate sons as heirs was preferred over bastards (Abel 1:43).⁷⁷

The bastards were viewed as polluted and illegitimate offspring,⁷⁸ and were not allowed in the assembly of the Lord (Deut 23:2). Likewise, children born in illicit unions were deemed illegitimate; hence, not considered for sharing divine privileges (Heb 12:8).⁷⁹

⁷³ Thoralf Gilbrant and Tor Inge Gilbrant, *The Complete Biblical Library: The New Testament Greek-English Dictionary (CBL)*, ed. Ralph W. Harris, Stanley M. Horton, and Gayle Garrity Seaver, Accordance electronic edition (Tulsa, OK: Empowered Life, 1986), s.v. “ἡγιάζω.”

⁷⁴ Moisés Silva, ed., “ἀκάθαρτος,” *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology and Exegesis*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2014), 2:568.

⁷⁵ Trail, 1 Corinthians, *An Exegetical Summary of 1 Corinthians 1-9*, 269.

⁷⁶ Ferguson, *Backgrounds of Early Christianity*, 74-75, 77.

⁷⁷ *The Works of Philo*, Completed and Unabridged, new updated edition trans., Charles D. Yonge [CD ROM] (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1993).

⁷⁸ M. G. Easton, *Easton's Bible Dictionary*, 3rd ed., Accordance electronic edition (London, EN: Thomas Nelson, 1897), s.v. “Bastard.”

⁷⁹ T. Ress, *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia (ISBE)*, ed. James Orr (London EN: Wm B. Eerdmans, 1915), s.v. “Bastard.”

David H. Stern adds that the use of ἀκάθαρτά is akin to the Hebrew word “mamzer” which implied an illegitimate son, and a bastard.⁸⁰

Similarly, in the Greco-Roman culture, married wives were for the bearing of legitimate children.⁸¹ Therefore, the research posits that the uncleanness (ἀκάθαρτά) and purity or holiness (ἁγιά) (v14) of the children have to do with being illegitimate (unacceptable) or legitimate (acceptable) in the society as demanded by the societal laws, as opposed to being morally unclean or holy⁸² before God by birth in a Christian family.⁸³ I now turn to the phrase ἐν τῇ γυναικί.

Phrase Study

The relationship of the preposition ἐν to the articular dative ἐν τῇ γυναικί is critical to the understanding of the meaning in the text.

Syntactical Relationship of ἐν τῇ Γυναικί

The relationship of the preposition ἐν with the dative has nuances that affect its meaning. William D. Mounce suggests that the dative case has three major categories such as: “pure dative, translated with “to, for”: locative dative, translated with “in, at, within,” and instrumental dative, translated with “by, by means of.”⁸⁴

The research suggests that the use of the preposition ἐν in the prepositional phrase ἐν τῇ γυναικί is a marker of personal relationship as discussed earlier in this study. The position is based on the literary context and syntactical relationship with ἡγίασται as already mentioned in this work. Additionally, the causal γὰρ in ἡγίασται γὰρ renders the action in ἡγίασται as the reason for

⁸⁰ David H. Stern, *Jewish New Testament Commentary: A Companion Volume to the Jewish New Testament*, Accordance electronic ed. (Clarksville, MD: Jewish New Testament Publications, 1992), para. 8875.

⁸¹ Charles C. Kroeger, *Dictionary of New Testament Backgrounds (DNTB)*, (Westmont, IL: InterVarsity Christian Fellowship, 2000), s.v. “Women in Greco-Roman World and Judaism.”

⁸² Trail, 1 Corinthians, *An Exegetical Summary of 1 Corinthians 1-9*, 270.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 269.

⁸⁴ Mounce, *Biblical Greek: A Compact Guide*, 27-28

prohibiting divorce on the part of the believing partner, due to the action of the subject (unbeliever).

Besides, the sense of the indirect middle voice (subject acting with self-interest in the action)⁸⁵ in ἡγίασται verse 14, as well as in χωρίζεται, and χωρίζεσθω in verse 15, logically is akin to personal relationship,⁸⁶ thus, ἐν τῇ γυναικί would mean “to unite/belong to his wife.”

The research now turns to the sentence in verse 14 encompassing the phrase ἐν τῇ γυναικί.

Sentence Study

To appreciate the prepositional phrase ἐν τῇ γυναικί meaning, the study analyzes the whole verse construction in verse 14. As noted earlier, the conjunction γὰρ has both an explanatory and inferential force,⁸⁷ that is, “it introduces the reason or cause of what precedes it”⁸⁸ in vv 12-13, at the same time concluding the thought in verse 14. ἡγίασται in the indirect middle voice, shows self-interest,⁸⁹ in the action on the part of the subjects (the unbelieving husband and wife).

Hence, ἡγίασται fits the rendition “he has/is devoted (in his own self-interest).”⁹⁰ The phrase ἐν τῇ γυναικί expresses personal relationship,⁹¹ thus, the rendition “to unite to/belong to his wife”⁹² is preferable.

⁸⁵ William D. Mounce, *Basics of Biblical Greek Grammar*, 3rd ed., Accordance electronic ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 228.

⁸⁶ Harris, *Prepositions and Theology in the Greek New Testament*, 129.

⁸⁷ Thomas, *Greek Dictionary of the New American Standard Exhaustive Concordance*, s.v. “γὰρ.”

⁸⁸ Henry G. Liddell, and Robert Scott, *Greek-English Lexicon*, s.v. “γὰρ.”

⁸⁹ Stevens, *New Testament Greek*, 24-25.

⁹⁰ Translation mine.

⁹¹ Murray J. Harris, *Prepositions and Theology in the Greek New Testament*, 129.

⁹² Translation mine.

The use of a subordinate conjunction ἐπεὶ as causal, and coordinating conjunction ἄρα as inferential conjunction,⁹³ implies reason and conclusion on the previous thought on the marriage union, and the effects on the children that they were now legitimate or acceptable (νῦν δὲ ἄγια ἐστίν). On this account, the thought in the sentence is that “because the unbelieving husband has/is devoted (in his own self-interest) to (unite to/belong to) his wife and the unbelieving wife has/is devoted (in her own self-interest) to (unite to/belong to) her husband: Otherwise, then your children were impure (illegitimate), but now they are pure or acceptable (legitimate).”⁹⁴

Unit Study

Putting the entire unit, 1 Corinthians 7:12-16, in its literary context, the conditional clause εἴ τις ἀδελφὸς γυναῖκα ἔχει ἄπιστον, (if any brother has unbelieving wife), μὴ ἀφιέτω (let him not divorce), implies the command negated divorce based on self-interest on the part of the unbelieving wife in v12. Similarly, in verse 13 καὶ γυνὴ εἴ τις ἔχει ἄνδρα ἄπιστον, (and if any wife has an unbelieving husband), the command negated divorce based on the unbelieving husband’s consent to continue. Paul addressed believing partners because in Roman law both parties had the liberty to divorce the partner unilaterally.⁹⁵

The use of the present tense in the indicative mood in συνευδοκεῖ and the present infinitive in οἰκεῖν⁹⁶ indicates certainty or reality⁹⁷ of the action and continuation of the action ⁹⁸ respectively on the part

⁹³ Robertson, *A Grammar of the Greek New Testament in the Light of Historical Research*, Accordance electronic edition [CD ROM].

⁹⁴ Translation mine.

⁹⁵ Walton and Keener, eds., *NIV Cultural Backgrounds Study Bible* [CD ROM] (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2016).

⁹⁶ *Novum Testamentum Graece Novum Testamentum Graece*, 28th ed., ed. Nestle Eberhard, Erwin Nestle, Barbara Aland, Kurt Aland, Johannes Karavidopoulos, Carlo M. Martini, and Bruce M. Metzger. Accordance electronic edition [CD ROM] (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2013).

⁹⁷ Stevens, *New Testament Greek*, 26.

⁹⁸ Trail, *1 Corinthians, An Exegetical Summary of 1 Corinthians 1-9: Exegetical Summary Series*, 267.

of the unbelieving one. This implies that the unbelieving partner needed to be certain that ‘he/she agrees to continue living together with the believing partner. μή ἀφιέτω (a present imperative) connotes that the command was stopping any continuing⁹⁹ efforts to divorce on the part of the believer, when the unbeliever agreed to continue in marriage. The use of the perfect tense comes next.

The Use of the Perfect Tense in Middle/Passive Voice

The use of the perfect tense has two implications: it focuses on past actions and affirms the current results.¹⁰⁰ The tense implies that the unbeliever has already been in marriage and agreed to continue living together with the believer, hence the negation of divorce. This is because the unbeliever ἡγίασται has/is devoted (in his own self-interest) to (belonging to) his or her partner. In the phrase οὐ δεδούλωται, δεδούλωται is a perfect tense in the middle voice,¹⁰¹ yet it can also take the perfective present in meaning.¹⁰² Hence, it can mean that he/she is not to put herself/himself (direct middle sense) under bondage. Having dealt with the use of perfect tense, this study turns to the synthesis.

Synthesis, Conclusion and Reflections

From the foregoing study analysis, all the divergent views seem to favour the passive voice sense either with locative dative, translated with “in, at, within,” or instrumental dative, translated with “by, by means of.”¹⁰³ However, the research points out that in the New Testament, sanctification of persons is an act of God, the Holy Spirit, and Jesus by faith in believers.¹⁰⁴ Furthermore, the New Testament sanctification puts Christ as the sphere, means,

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ Ernest De Witt Burton, *Syntax of the Moods and Tenses in New Testament Greek*, Accordance electronic edition [CD ROM] (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago press, 1903).

¹⁰¹ *Novum Testamentum Graece Novum Testamentum Graece*, 28th ed., Accordance electronic edition [CD ROM]. Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2013.

¹⁰² Zodhiates, *The Complete Word Study Dictionary: New Testament*, s.v. “ἐάν.”

¹⁰³ Mounce, *Biblical Greek: A Compact Guide*, 27-28

¹⁰⁴ Thoralf Gilbrant and Tor Inge Gilbrant, *The Complete Biblical Library*, s.v. “ἀγιάζω.”

agent, cause, and not humans (cf. Jude 1; Hebrews 2:11, 10:10, 10:14; 1 Cor 1:2).

To the question (1) what is the meaning of ἐν τῇ γυναικί in 7:14? The analysis in the following sections helps arrive at a probable meaning. The social background indicates that marriages and divorces in the first century were contracted and dissolved by mutual consent. For this reason, the sense of “to unite to his wife” in ἐν τῇ γυναικί is preferable. Therefore, ἐν marks personal relationship, and the use of middle voice in verse 14 ἡγίασται (he/she has/is devoted (in his/her own self-interest) supports this rendition.

The Literary context reveals that 1 Corinthians 7:14, is a continuation and explanation as to why the commands given to the believing wife and husband not to divorce their partners were given in vv12-13 indicated by the causal conjunction γὰρ.

The reason being ἡγίασται “he/she has/is devoted (in his/her own self-interest) to unite/belong to his/her wife. Therefore, the phrase appears to express personal relationships, as personal interest is key to marriage.

The literary form of the unit in vv12-16 suggests it is a command or admonishment, hence, applies to a specific situation of mixed marriages, therefore, ἐν τῇ γυναικί marks personal relationship in such a union.

The literary structure shows that ἡγίασται γὰρ (because he/she has/is devoted in his/her own self-interest) ἐν τῇ γυναικί (to unite/belong to his wife) verse 14, as the reason for not divorcing.

To the question (2) what is the semantic and syntactic meaning of the preposition ἐν in the phrase under discussion? The detailed analysis reveals that the syntactical relationship in the phrase ἐν τῇ γυναικί in relation to the indirect middle voice in ἡγίασται, affirms personal relationship. Word study shows that the preposition ἐν in ἐν τῇ γυναικί, carries the sense of “to (unite to/belong to) his wife,” with the dative γυναικί. The force of the conjunction γὰρ in verses 14 and 16 is explanatory and causal, hence ἐν τῇ γυναικί explains the reason for the negation of divorce based on the subjects’ actions.

The sentence analysis favours the interpretation “because the unbelieving husband has/is devoted (in his own self-interest) to (unite to) his wife and the unbelieving wife has/is devoted (in her own self-interest) to (belong to) her husband: Otherwise, then your children were illegitimate or unacceptable (impure), but now they are legitimate or acceptable (pure).” The use of the perfect tense entails focusing on past actions and affirming current results. This means the unbeliever has already been in marriage and agreed to continue living together with the believer at the time of the speaker, hence the negation of divorce. The reason being the unbeliever’s ἡγίασται (self-dedicated) to his or her partner.

Consequently, ἐν τῇ γυναίκί expresses personal relationship in marriage, and its syntactical relationship with ἡγίασται favours the use of the indirect middle voice as opposed to the passive voice, hence, the meaning “to unite to his wife” is the probable rendition. For this reason, the study concludes that taking the phrase in its historical, literary, semantical and syntactical context, the probable sentence meaning, should be “because the unbelieving husband has/is devoted (in his own self-interest) to (unite to) his wife and the unbelieving wife has/is devoted (in her own self-interest) to (belong to) her husband: Otherwise, then your children were illegitimate or unacceptable (impure), but now they are pure or acceptable (legitimate).

Today, the Church should take marriage seriously, as an institution of great importance from God’s perspective. The believer married to an unbeliever at the point of conversion should not seek to divorce their partner unless the unbelieving partner decides in his or her own self-interest to leave. Mutual consent on the part of the unbeliever is the determining factor in the continuity and dissolution of such a marriage. The call for peace and unity in marriage is based on the willingness of non-believers to continue in the marriage.

Muchabwe Mayboy is a PhD Student in Biblical and Theological Studies (New Testament Emphasis) at the Adventist University of Africa, Kenya. He could be reached at muchabwem@aua.ac.ke