

What Did Paul Mean? The Debate on 1 Cor 7:1-7

by
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While turning over the leaves of the Margaret Thrall Festschrift at the Barcelona SNTS-Meeting, 2004, my eye was caught by Professor G. D. Fee's article "1 Corinthians 7:1-7 Revisited". This is an attempt to refute the criticism I directed in my 1994 Leuven Colloquium paper "'Fornication' and 'Concession'? Interpreting 1 Cor 7:1-7" against the position of his Commentary"¹. At the Colloquium, a friend of his asked my permission to communicate my paper to Fee, which I granted freely.

It is astonishing how Fee thinks he can ride out the devastating criticism that was directed against his many incorrect statements about linguistic matters on which he had based his interpretation, and tries, instead, to rid himself of my criticism by presenting me throughout his paper as an advocate of the "traditional view". He himself represents, the "new" or "emergent consensus", i.e. the more enlightened, and hence, the supposedly correct view. He apparently thinks that hard, factual argument, might lose its evidential value if the opponent can be made to appear as a "traditionalist". However, in order to guard against the boomerang effect, he has tucked away in the footnotes the admission "Although it must be pointed out that C.'s [= Caragounis's] view is anything but 'traditional' on several other matters, as will be pointed out later" (p. 198, n. 7). But if my view is "anything but traditional", then I must decline the proffered honor! As a matter of fact, I begin my discussion by criticizing and rejecting both the 'traditional' and the 'new consensus' views² without using any loaded expressions, but simply referring to them as "View One" and "View Two". This I deem to be the correct procedure, in order to let the discussion run on the basis of hard arguments and facts rather than prejudice.³

My article revolved around three problematic areas (1) the persons addressed in 1 Cor 7:1, (2) the meaning of διὰ δὲ τὰς πορνείας (vs. 2). and (3) the meaning of συγγνώμη (vs. 6). Having read Fee's 'refutation', I think not only that my criticism

¹ My study appeared in *The Corinthian Correspondence*, ed. R. Bieringer, Leuven: Peeters 1996, 543-59.

² This is admitted by Fee at a later point (p. 200).

³ If at any point I share a common position with the traditional or the new consensus views, that makes me neither a supporter of the one nor of the other. Not all details of a rejected position need be wrong.

was well-deserved, but also that today I would have expressed myself more strongly on some of the issues touched upon in 1994.

The present paper assumes knowledge of the argument and evidence I presented against Fee's position in my earlier study. This evidence will not be repeated here.

Fee's first objection is that I tone down the Corinthians "sexual immorality". This charge is made because I have asserted that in the past inordinate emphasis has been placed on the 'sinfulness' of the Corinthians, and for claiming that "the Corinthians Christians would seem to have been very ordinary Christians, of the sort that have populated Christian Churches throughout the centuries" (p. 201)⁴. Having lived and worked for almost fifty years within many different, chiefly Protestant, denominations, I would now be inclined to say that my statement was actually an understatement. But it is, understandably, easier to talk about the immorality of a bygone age, especially if this can be utilized to uphold a favorite interpretation, than to talk about current problems.⁵

1. The Persons Addressed

In trying to controvert my first point, Fee writes:

What kind of syntactical relationships are involved in a sentence that reads: *περὶ δὲ ὧν ἐγράψατε, καλὸν ἀνθρώπῳ γυναικὸς μὴ ἄπτεσθαι*? For if one tries to *diagram* this sentence grammatically, where would the opening prepositional phrase be positioned (as a modifier) in relation to the main clause (*καλὸν κτλ.*)? The point, of course, is that the sentence *qua* sentence could be diagrammed all right (the preposition would modify the suppressed "is"), but in fact such a sentence makes no sense at all ... The sentence as it stands is a *non sequitur*.⁶

Fee's claim in the last two sentences leaves me dumbfounded. If he knows that the sentence *as* sentence is "all right", then what is the problem? For the sentence, in fact, does make not merely good but perfect sense, constituting Paul's partial

⁴ Fee claims that I have mistaken his presentation of others' views as his own. Actually, an author often betrays whether he is in agreement with a quote or not. Throughout his article Fee capitalizes on the Corinthians's 'immorality'. Now Fee finds it necessary to modify his statement by inserting "alleged" (p. 200 n.10), which implies that his statement was not interpreted incorrectly.

⁵ As I pen these words, in Sweden a pastor has been condemned to one month's imprisonment for having preached against homosexuality. A few years ago the Archbishop of Sweden allowed to set up in the country's chief Sanctuary (the Cathedral of Uppsala) an exhibition in which life-size pictures of naked men portrayed Jesus and John the Baptist as homosexuals and the Last Supper band of Jesus and his disciples as transvestites. Such things did not happen in the Corinth of Paul's day.

⁶ Fee, "1 Corinthians 7:1-7 Revisited", 203.

(first preference) answer. He returns to the idea that it is better for a man not to touch a woman, i.e. not to marry, repeatedly in this chapter (vv. 7, 8, 26-28, 36-38⁷, and 40). If Fee pronounces such a sentence a *non sequitur*, one is, unfortunately, forced to wonder how Fee relates to the Greek text. Such sentences as this must have occurred on the lips of Greeks times without number.⁸

In support of the claim that the sentence is a *non sequitur* if καλὸν etc. is understood as Paul's words, he contends that the phrase περὶ δὲ occurs six times in 1 Cor, and that in all other cases there is a 'specific content', e.g. "the virgins" (vs. 25).⁹ What he, however, fails to note is that the phrase περὶ δὲ is constructed with a genitive. The content of περὶ δὲ in 7:1 is clearly the genitive ὧν ἐγράψατε.¹⁰ Thus, this clause, too, is constructed with the necessary genitive. The phrase ὧν ἐγράψατε is sufficient to signal the grammatically correct expression for περὶ δὲ, although we do not *a priori* know what exactly lies behind ἐγράψατε. However, the specific content of ἐγράψατε is known both to the Corinthians and to Paul (and here we shall do well to remember, that in corresponding with his churches, Paul did not have us moderns in mind!). Both Paul and the Corinthians know what they are corresponding about, and the issue under discussion gradually becomes clear even for us, outsiders, when we read Paul's answer. To what issue of their letter he is referring becomes clear from the content of his opinion: "it is better for a man not to touch a woman". The sentence beginning with καλὸν, therefore, cannot be made the content of ἐγράψατε (this is forbidden by grammar)¹¹, as though it were the Corinthians' own words, but is Paul's answer in reference to their questions.

Having settled once and for all this initial but basic point that καλὸν ἀνθρώπω κτλ. sets forth Paul's own position, we can now go on to deal with the other misapprehensions of the virgins club theory.

⁷ On which now see Caragounis, *The Development of Greek and the New Testament* (WUNT 167), Tübingen: Mohr-Siebeck 2004, 299-316.

⁸ Accordingly, in Neohellenic one could say, for example: ὅσον ἀφορᾷ ἐκεῖνο περὶ τοῦ ὁποίου μοῦ ἔγραψες, καλὰ θὰ κάμεις νὰ μὴ ἔλθης πρὸς τὸ παρὸν = "with regard to that which you wrote to me about, you will do well (better) not to come for the time being". There is absolutely no problem with this Pauline sentence.

⁹ Fee, "1 Corinthians 7:1-7 Revisited", 203.

¹⁰ The longer reading μοι, supported by A D F G Ψ and the Majority text (the so-called Byzantine, see Caragounis, *The Development of Greek*, 482 ff.) would make the reference of ὧν ἐγράψατε even more definite. However, although this reading is probably original (it has good MS support, is also witnessed by other ancient witnesses not noted in *N-A*: Origenes, Chrysostomos, Theodoretos, *Catena in 1 Cor*, and finally it gives the best sense), in order not to prejudice my argument, I will not base it on it. On the other hand, whether μοι is included or not, the meaning is still the same, since the Corinthians' letter was addressed to Paul.

¹¹ See Caragounis, "'Fornication' and 'Concession'?" 545f. and 559.

2. *The Meaning of ἄπτεσθαι γυναικός*

Fee chides me for having written that ἄπτεσθαι γυναικός “is not a set expression for having sexual intercourse”. He says that “His [Caragounis’] reason for this, however, does not seem to be lexical: rather he makes these demmurals because he wants to take the phrase as a metonymy for marriage” (204), and he goes on to present eight texts that are supposed to prove that this phrase always means just what he takes it to mean. Fee does not even give me the benefit of the doubt that, on the contrary, I might, for example, be taking γυναικός μὴ ἄπτεσθαι *in this particular context* as a way of referring to marriage precisely because the expression *is not a set expression for having sexual relations*. But let us turn to what I actually wrote:

The expression γυναικός μὴ ἄπτεσθαι in such a context is naturally euphemistic, and has the sense of “not to have relations with a woman”. The phrase corresponds to another, more usual phrase in antiquity, sc. τὰ Ἀφροδίσεια, “sex relations”. Under what form these relations are to be had the verb itself says nothing about. Fee, who mistakenly supposes that the statement represents the position of Corinthian ascetics “promoting an ascetic ideal, not simply celibacy per se”, claims – again mistakenly – that the expression always without ambiguity ... refers to having sexual intercourse”¹², and adds that it cannot be “extended or watered down to mean ‘... to marry’”¹³.

Having read Fee’s objections and arguments against this in his rejoinder, I consider that I could not have expressed the situation better than I have done in the above statement.

That I have interpreted the expression γυναικός μὴ ἄπτεσθαι as euphemistic and as meaning “not to have (sexual) relations with a woman” is quite plain from the above quote. It is, therefore, gratuitous for Fee to strain himself to prove by means of his eight texts that this expression refers to sexual relations. No one denies that this phrase *often* refers to such relations.¹⁴ What I have pointed out, however, is that this phrase “*is not a set expression for having sexual intercourse, as Fee seems to suppose*” (p. 547, n. 15), and that Fee has misinterpreted some of his eight examples, which do not support his claims. Fee’s comment that my “reason for this, however, does not seem to be lexical” is unfair, since I did criticize his interpretation of these texts. I will, however, now do it even more explicitly.

1. It must be insisted upon here that Ruth 2:9 is not concerned with sexual relations but has the general sense of molestation.

¹² Following my criticism, he now, however, concedes that he had overstated his case when he said “always without ambiguity”.

¹³ Caragounis, “Fornication’ and ‘Concession’?” 546f.

¹⁴ Indeed, Greek literature exhibits a large number of texts with this meaning.

2. Gen 20:6 is interesting. Abimelech took Sarah from Abraham apparently because his own wife could not bear him children. Thus, he took Sara to make her his wife. The detail in vs. 17 that God healed Abimelech and his wife and so they could now have children, not only shows this but also implies that Abimelech had taken Sara not for casual sexual relations but in order for her to be his wife (she had apparently stayed for some time in his house, since what vs.18 describes could not have taken place in one night). See also the Josephos text, below.

3. Moreover, Fee does not cite Gen 26:7-11. Now this text is important, for it shows that the same expression (ἄπτεισθαι + gen.) is used with regard to *both* Isaak and Rebecca (ὁ ἀπτόμενος τοῦ ἀνθρώπου τούτου ἢ τῆς γυναικὸς αὐτοῦ), where clearly at least the reference to Isaak does not have any sexual overtones.

4. But there is more evidence against Fee's position. Plutarchos, *Alexander*, 21 has been misunderstood by Fee. The text goes:

Ἄλλ' Ἀλέξανδρος ... τὸ κρατεῖν ἑαυτοῦ βασιλικώτερον ἡγούμενος, οὔτε τούτων ἔθιγεν οὔτε ἄλλην ἔγνω, πλὴν Βαρσίνης. αὕτη δὲ μετὰ τὴν Μέμνονος τελευτὴν χήρα γενομένη ... πεπαιδευμένην δὲ παιδείαν ἑλληνικὴν καὶ τρόπον ἐπιεικῆς οὔσα ... Παρμενίωνος προτρεψαμένου τὸν Ἀλέξανδρον ... καλῆς καὶ γενναίας ἄψασθαι γυναικός.

But Alexander ... who considered self-restraint as more royal, neither touched (NB! ἔθιγεν) them (Darius' female relatives) nor did he know any other woman before marriage, except Barsine. This woman after [her husband] Memnon's death became widow ... had received a Greek education and was of gentle manners. ... At the suggestion of Parmenion [Alexander's old general] Alexander ... (decided) to attach himself to such a beautiful and noble woman [i.e. *as wife!*].

Here the verb θιγγάνω is used of casual relations to Darius' women relatives, which are said never to have taken place, while the verb ἄπτεισθαι is reserved for expressing Alexander's *marriage* to Barsine. It is interesting that Plutarchos speaks first of Alexander's not knowing (ἔγνω) any woman except Barsine and then goes on to qualify how this "knowing" of Barsine took place: it was when Alexander, at the suggestion of Parmenion, *married* Barsine — a procedure that Plutarchos describes by the verb ἄψασθαι! Plutarchos, therefore, witnesses to the use of ἄπτεισθαι (γυναικός) with the meaning of "marry (a woman)". Fee mentioned this text but did not quite understand its import.

5. Another one of Fee's eight examples is Josephus, *Antiquities*, I. 161-65. Again the import of this text has not been adequately presented by Fee, who apparently did not examine the context but merely contented himself with taking a sentence out of the Loeb translation. Thus, he misunderstood what the text actually means. The text is:

Διὸ καὶ Φαραώθης ὁ βασιλεὺς ... θεάσασθαι σπουδάσας οἷός τ' ἦν ἄψασθαι τῆς Σάρρας (“Wherefore, also Pharaoh, the king ... was minded (diligent) to see her and was about to ἄψασθαι Sarah”).

What Josephus means by ἄψασθαι becomes clear a few lines further down, at I. 165, a text that Fee neither quotes nor refers to:

Νομίζων γὰρ ἀδελφὴν ἀλλ' οὐ γυναῖκα αὐτοῦ σπουδάσαι περὶ αὐτὴν συγγένειαν ποιήσασθαι βουλόμενος (“Believing that she was his [Abraham’s] sister, he [Pharaoh] showed eagerness to become his relative by means of her [i.e. by *marrying* Sarah]).¹⁵

Quite clearly then, Josephus uses ἄψασθαι τῆς Σάρρας in the sense of “marrying Sarah”.

The expression καλὸν ἀνθρώπῳ γυναικὸς μὴ ἄπτεισθαι is comparative: “it is better for a man not to touch a woman”. This is made clear by the fact that Paul has another alternative, namely, the course of action that he recommends in verse 2¹⁶. That such a suggestion, “not to touch a woman”, could never have been made by Paul if it related to marriage relations – as Fee construes it – becomes obvious from the fact that Paul insists on full marital relations. The expression, therefore, refers to celibacy, that is, that it is better not to have any relations with any woman, i.e. not to marry at all, and he gives reasons for that later in the same chapter (cf. vs. 8: καλὸν αὐτοῖς ἐὰν μείνωσιν ὡς καὶ γὰρ, vs. 26: διὰ τὴν ἐνεστῶσαν ἀνάγκην)¹⁷.

The above linguistic treatment leads to the conclusion that the examples that Fee has presented to prove his contention that ἄπτεισθαι γυναικὸς refer always without ambiguity to having sexual relations to the exclusion of marriage is simply not true¹⁸.

¹⁵ Even the Loeb edition renders by “he had wished to contract a marriage alliance”. If Fee had examined the context, he might have been spared the embarrassment. I regret that I did not investigate this text more minutely in 1994, but unnecessarily half conceded it to Fee.

¹⁶ See Caragounis, “Fornication’ and ‘Concession’?” 546.

¹⁷ Fee makes light of the facts that if sexual relations within marriage were in view here, Paul would have used ἀνὴρ not ἄνθρωπος and he would have qualified γυναικὸς by a possessive.

¹⁸ The Fathers and other early authors understand γυναικὸς μὴ ἄπτεισθαι as connected with marriage. Thus Eusebios, *Quaestiones evangelicae ad Stephanum*, 28. 22: μετὰ δὲ τὸ συναφθῆναι τὸν Ἰωσήφ καὶ παρ’ αὐτῷ γενέσθαι, παρὰ πᾶσι τε γυναῖκα αὐτοῦ χρηματίσαι, συνόντων ἀλλήλοις, καὶ τῆς γαμικῆς ὁμιλίας ἄπτεισθαι; In his *De Virginitate* 27. 51: Chrysostomos connects the Pauline saying with marriage: ὅπερ οὖν καὶ ὁ μακάριος Παῦλος ἐποίησεν. Εἰπὼν γάρ: “Καλὸν ἀνθρώπῳ γυναικὸς μὴ ἄπτεισθαι”, ἀπεπήδησεν ἐπὶ τὸν γάμον εὐθέως, while in 61. 151: he shows that he understands γυναικὸς μὴ ἄπτεισθαι as referring to virginity: Καὶ πρὸς ταῦτα ἀντιγράφων καὶ περὶ τοῦ γάμου νομοθετῶν, εἰσάγει καὶ τὸν περὶ τῆς παρθενίας λόγον: Καλὸν ἀνθρώπῳ γυναικὸς μὴ ἄπτεισθαι. That Chrysostomos understands γυναικὸς μὴ ἄπτεισθαι of marriage, becomes clear from his *De Virginitate* 32:41, in which he cites it along with Mt 19:10: Διὰ τοῦτο γὰρ ἀρχόμενος ἔλεγε: “Καλὸν ἀνθρώπῳ γυναικὸς μὴ

3. Διὰ δὲ τὰς πορνείας

I have argued this issue at length in my first study to which the reader is referred. Here I will only comment on Fee's objections. He writes:

What makes Caragounis's view seem untenable is his assertion following the quote from Tobit: 'Tobias' use of διὰ πορνείαν (singular and [anarthrous] is to all intents and purposes an identical construction with the one under consideration)¹⁹.

And he comments "And so by fiat one removes the obstacles of the article and the plural!"

This comment is obviously uninformed. If we suppose that Paul had used διὰ δὲ τὰς ἐπιθυμίας – would not this expression have referred to "lusts"? In a similar manner, if Tobias had said: οὐ δι' ἐπιθυμίαν ἐγὼ λαμβάνω τὴν ἀδελφὴν μου ταύτην – would not the expression have meant the same thing? There can be no doubt about either of these sentences. Thus, when I wrote "to all intents and purposes", I was referring to the fact, and I said so, too, that on the surface there are the differences of the article and the plural, but that these differences have no bearing on the meaning conveyed. It is, thus, not a "fiat" but feeling for what is natural for Greek that lies behind my statement. Or is Fee unaware that many things can be said in Greek both with and without the article without changing the basic meaning? Paul could not have written διὰ δὲ πορνείας; he had to use the article since he had chosen to use the plural, nor could Tobias have said: διὰ τὰς πορνείας, since he was using the singular, nor again διὰ τὴν πορνείαν. The anarthrous singular was the correct procedure in this case. Similarly, in Gal 5:16 we read: καὶ ἐπιθυμίαν σαρκὸς οὐ μὴ τελέσητε. But this could hardly have been καὶ τὴν ἐπιθυμίαν (τῆς) σαρκὸς οὐ κτλ. for then he would have limited himself to just one type of desire. He could, of course, have written καὶ ἐπιθυμίας σαρκὸς κτλ., and he could also have expressed it by καὶ τὰς ἐπιθυμίας τῆς σαρκὸς κτλ. Again in Col 3:5: νεκρώσατε οὖν τὰ μέλη τὰ ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς, πορνείαν, ἀκαθαρσίαν, πάθος

ἄπτεισθαι". Διὰ τοῦτο καὶ οἱ μαθηταὶ πρὸς τὸν κύριον εἶπον· "Εἰ οὕτως ἐστὶν ἡ αἰτία τοῦ ἀνθρώπου μετὰ τῆς γυναικός, οὐ συμφέρει γαμῆσαι", see also his Commentary on 1 Corinthians ad loc. Further, Theodoretos, *Interpretation in xiv epistulas sancti Pauli*, (Migny) 82. 272. 8 writes: τῆς δὲ πορνείας κατηγορῶν, συγχωρῶν δὲ τὴν γαμικὴν κοινωνίαν. Εἰρηκῶς γάρ, ὅτι καλὸν ἀνθρώπῳ γυναικὸς μὴ ἄπτεισθαι, ἐπήγαγε· "Διὰ δὲ τὰς πορνείας ἕκαστος τὴν ἰδίαν γυναῖκα ἐχέτω". Theodoretos understood ἐχέτω of marriage! Finally, Nikolaos I Mystikos (IX-X A.D.), *Opuscula diversa* 199. XI.1 while discussing marriage quotes Paul's words to show that γυναικὸς μὴ ἄπτεισθαι refers to celibacy, i. e. not to marry: ὅτι τοῦ ἀποστόλου 'Καλὸν ἀνθρώπῳ γυναικὸς μὴ ἄπτεισθαι' τὴν ἀγαμίαν προτιμῶντος εἴρηται ("That the Apostle's 'it is better for a man not to touch a woman' was said to show his preference for celibacy").

¹⁹ Caragounis, "Fornication' and 'Concession'?", 551, referred to by Fee, "1 Corinthians 7:1-7 Revisited", 208.

κτλ. could also have been: τὴν πορνείαν, τὴν ἀκαθαρσίαν, τὸ πάθος, κτλ. Thus, that Paul uses the arthrous plural διὰ δὲ τὰς πορνείας can under no circumstances in this context be understood as implying concrete cases of fornication and not the metonymical use of πορνεία to mean “lusts”, lusts that *can* lead to fornication²⁰.

Moreover, the metonymical use of πορνείας for ‘lusts’ here finds corroboration in vv. 36-38. This text, too, is currently interpreted problematically. For example, Fee tries to establish the same line of interpretation, that is, that this text is written in the light of the virgins club in Corinth, but he soon runs into difficulties and in the end he is forced to admit failure to having interpreted the text satisfactorily. The reader is here conveniently referred to the recent discussion of this problem in my *The Development of Greek and the New Testament*, 299-316.

It also causes astonishment that Fee can treat so lightly the observation I made earlier that, if Paul had intended actual cases of immorality, he would have used μοιχείας rather than πορνείας (my study, p. 550). Nor is he willing to face the problem squarely that, if actual cases of immorality were in view here, Paul would necessarily be making also the Christian women go to the brothels of Corinth, since the admonition is directed to *both* men and women! His explanation that:

In the “traditional view,” the women are the beneficiaries of Paul’s admonition (they get to be married, which at the same time will hopefully stave off the men’s going to the prostitutes); In (sic) the “emerging consensus,” they are themselves the cause of the problem (by denying sexual relations to their husbands, the latter satisfy their sexual needs elsewhere)

is no answer at all to the insuperable problem I have raised: namely, that Paul’s words apply *equally to both men and women*, and that in Fee’s interpretation, the Corinthian women, too, would be in the habit of going to the prostitutes of Corinth, a clearly absurd idea. It thus appears that what interpretation is grammatically possible or impossible in Greek is a matter of no consequence. The choice seems to be dictated by the theory rather than by what the text says.

4. *The Meaning of ἐχέτω*

Objecting to Fee’s peculiar interpretation of ἐχέτω and his consequent exegesis, I wrote:

Fee insists that “that there is no known evidence that the idiom ‘to have a wife’ means ‘to take a wife’” and argues that the meaning of ἐχέτω is “to take a woman sexually”, i.e. “to have sexual relations with a woman / wife”. Once again Fee has not been careful in his

²⁰ That such lusts could in some cases lead to actual πορνεία is true, and I have said so (550), but this is irrelevant here.

collation of the evidence. The verb ἔχω can certainly be used of “marrying a wife” as well as of “having a wife”, i.e. of being married or living in the state of marriage²¹.

and then went on to treat briefly the evidence that Fee had presented, showing that it did not support his conclusion.

In his rejoinder Fee brings no new evidence against my criticism. He simply reiterates his earlier arguments and thinks that there is

no compelling reason to think that the language here has anything other than its normal usage: “let each man continue in relations with his own wife and each wife continue in relations with her own husband”.

This is an awful lot of English words for the Greek ἐχέτω! But is this the “normal usage” of this verb? Let us see.

The verb ἔχειν is used in a very large number of senses²². One of these is when the verb is used of a man in relation to a woman or of a woman in relation to a man. In both cases the sense is to have as wife / husband, i.e. ‘to be married to’. As examples I cite: Homeros, *Odysseia*, IV. 569: οὐνεκ ἔχεις Ἑλένην καὶ σφι γαμβρὸς Διὸς ἔσσι (“for you have Helen to wife and for them you are Zeus’ son in law”)²³; Xenophon, *Kyrou Paideia*, I. 5. 4: Κυαξάρης δὲ ... ἐπεμπε ... πρὸς Καμβύσην τὸν τὴν ἀδελφὴν ἔχοντα (“Kyaxares send a message to Kambyses who had married his sister / had his sister to wife”); Mk 6:18: ἔλεγεν δὲ ὁ Ἰωάννης τῷ Ἡρώδῃ ὅτι οὐκ ἔξεστιν σοι ἔχειν τὴν γυναῖκα τοῦ ἀδελφοῦ σου (“it is not permitted you to have [to wife] (i.e. ‘to be married to’) the wife of your brother”²⁴) and, what Fee mistakenly denies, of a woman who has a husband: Kallimachos, *Aitia*, III. 1. 27: οὐκ ἄλλον, νυμφίον ἐξέμεναι (“not to have another bridegroom / husband”). In Jn 4:17 the Samaritan woman says: οὐκ ἔχω ἄνδρα (“I have no husband”). Indeed, this meaning (used of both men and women) must have occurred times without number in the history of the language and still occurs in Neohellenic extremely frequently. The idea of “having a wife / husband” or of “being married” signals to Fee “sexual relations”. He thus thinks that “to have a wife / husband” means nothing other than “to have sexual relations with one’s wife or husband”. This is a great mistake. As I have pointed out in my earlier study, sexual relations are naturally implied in every normal marriage. But this idea is

²¹ Caragounis, “Fornication’ and ‘Concession?’” 547 f.

²² Δ. Δημητράκου, *Λεξικὸν ὅλης τῆς ἐλληνικῆς γλώσσης*, devotes to its uses 5,5 follio pages listing 55 meaning units, which contain even more particular senses.

²³ See also Homeros, *Odysseia*, VII. 313; *Ilias* III. 53; VI. 398.

²⁴ That this is a case of marriage, not merely of sexual relations (Fee’s thesis) is shown by Josephos’ explicit words in *Antiquities*, XVIII. 5. 1 (= XVIII. 110).

only in the background when this expression is used. To the Greek mind sexual relations are not the primary or consciously most highlighted meaning of the word ἔχειν γυναῖκα / ἄνδρα. For a Greek “to have a wife” means “to be married” and in certain contexts “to get married”. Accordingly, the Samaritan woman is not saying to Jesus “I am not having sexual relations with any man (*viz.* today, yesterday or tomorrow)”, but “I am not married to any man”!

Fee, who wants to interpret ἐχέτω in 1 Cor 7:2 not of marriage but of having sexual relations, claims that “there is no known evidence that the idiom ‘to have a wife’ means ‘to take a wife’” and argues that the meaning of ἐχέτω is “to take a woman sexually”²⁵. He tries to establish this meaning by means of Ex 2:1. That Fee has misinterpreted this passage I have shown already in my earlier article, to which the reader is referred²⁶. Here I reiterate one of the texts I took up at that time, with regard to which Fee now keeps quiet. Tob 3:8: reads:

Ἦν δεδομένη ἀνδράσιν ἑπτὰ, καὶ Ασμοδαυς τὸ πονηρὸν δαιμόνιον ἀπέκτεινεν αὐτούς πρὶν ἢ γενέσθαι αὐτούς μετ' αὐτῆς ὡς ἐν γυναιξίν. Καὶ εἶπαν αὐτῇ Οὐ συνίεις ἀποπνίγουσά σου τοὺς ἄνδρας; ἤδη ἑπτὰ ἔσχες καὶ ἐνὸς αὐτῶν οὐκ ὠνάσθης

She [Sara] had been given to seven men, but Asmodeus the evil demon killed them one by one before they had been [lain] with her as with women. And they [the servant girls] said to her: Do you not understand that you strangle your husbands? you have already been married to seven of them and you have had no pleasure with anyone of them!²⁷

This passage states that Sara had been married (ἔσχες) to seven husbands but that she had had no sexual relations (ὠνάσθης, cf. also πρὶν ἢ γενέσθαι αὐτούς μετ' αὐτῆς) with anyone of them! This passage deals the *coup de grâce* to Fee's interpretation. It is so decisive that it ought to have settled the matter long ago.

In spite of this, Fee, who perceived that his argument had been refuted, in his rejoinder, having nothing substantial to counterpose, merely quibbles that:

The verb is used to refer to someone who is, or has been married, not to someone heretofore unmarried who is going to “take a wife”²⁸.

It seems that Fee's theory must die “the death of a thousand qualifications”. This new objection by Fee simply flies in the face of Tob 3:8, which uses the verb ἔχω when speaking of Sara's seven marriages, i.e. she took (ἔσχες) seven men, and in regard to whom it is stated that she has had no sexual relations with anyone of them!

²⁵ So in his commentary, 278. See also Caragounis, “‘Fornication’ and ‘Concession’?” 547.

²⁶ Caragounis, “‘Fornication’ and ‘Concession’?”, 548.

²⁷ For this use of ὀνίνημι see Euripides, *Medeia* 1348: ὅς οὔτε λέκτρων νεογάμων ὀνήσομαι (“who will have no pleasure of the newly-wed bed”).

²⁸ Fee, “1 Corinthians 7:1-7 Revisited”, 210.

This Tobit passage is not unique in using ἔχω (ἄνδρα / γυναῖκα) in the sense of marrying or getting married to a wife or a husband. This meaning is found also e.g. in Herodotos, III. 31:

τότε οὖν Καμβύσης ἔγημε τὴν ἐρωμένην, μετὰ μέντοι οὐ πολλὸν χρόνον ἔσχευ ἄλλην ἀδελφὴν (“Then Kambyses married (ἔγημε) his beloved (a sister of his), and soon afterwards he married (ἔσχευ) another sister”)²⁹.

No one can dispute the fact that here, too, the verb ἔσχευ is used in the sense of “got married”. Indeed, the matter is so clear that Fee’s ‘problem’ with this expression should never have seen the light of day.

In this connection, Aristoteles is quite instructive. In his *Categories*, 15b, in which he discusses the various uses of the verb ἔχειν, he writes:

ἔχειν γὰρ οἰκίαν καὶ ἀγρὸν λεγόμεθα. λεγόμεθα δὲ καὶ γυναῖκα ἔχειν καὶ ἡ γυνὴ ἄνδρα· ἔοικε δὲ ἀλλοτριώτατος ὁ νῦν ῥηθεὶς τρόπος τοῦ ἔχειν εἶναι· οὐδὲν γὰρ ἄλλο τῷ ἔχειν γυναῖκα σημαίνομεν ἢ ὅτι συνοικεῖ.³⁰

We speak of having a house or a field. We also speak of having a wife and of a woman as having a husband. But the last instance of ‘having’ just mentioned seems to be quite different, since by having a wife we mean nothing other than to live with a wife.

What Aristoteles means is that having a wife or a husband does not signal *possession* as in the case of a house or a field, but *relation*: it means to live with a wife or a husband, that is, to live in the married state (συνοικεῖ). Now living in the married state implies much more than sex. Though important, sex occupies a very small part in the lives of the partners. What συνοικεῖ means becomes clear from 1 Pt 3:7, who uses the same verb as Aristoteles, when he writes:

οἱ ἄνδρες ὁμοίως συνοικοῦντες κατὰ γνῶσιν ὡς ἀσθενεστέρω σκεύει τῷ γυναικίῳ, ἀπονέμοντες τιμὴν ὡς καὶ συγκληρονόμοις χάριτος ζωῆς, κτλ.

Surely, Peter is not urging the husbands here *to be having sexual relations with their wives*, but *to live* their lives together daily in a manner that is consonant with their faith!

²⁹ See also *LSJ*, s.v. ἔχω.

³⁰ See further the distinction in the philosopher Simplicios, *In Aristotelis categorias commentarium*, 8. 368 and 372, between possession (κτῆματα) and relation (σχέσιν), in which he also quotes Aristoteles on the various meanings of ἔχειν.

5. *The Meaning of συγγνώμη*

The meaning of συγγνώμη has been adequately discussed in my earlier paper. There is no need to enlarge on this at present, especially since Fee has not really controverted my findings. He merely thinks that:

It is difficult to imagine that the Corinthians could have been able to extrapolate all of this out of a mere κατὰ συγγνώμην.³¹

This remark appears to stem from a lack of feeling for the pulse of the language, the idiom, the shared stock between those who communicate in Greek. “Extrapolating this” may be difficult for Fee but not for the Corinthians, who used the same language as Paul and knew what he was saying. I have discussed this matter fully in my 1994 study³².

6. *Conclusions*

The above discussion is a response to Dr Fee’s attempt to controvert my criticism of his interpretation of 1 Cor 7:1-7. Fee’s present article bristles with problematic grammatical assertions exhibiting a rather vague understanding of what is possible or impossible in Greek. But it has given me the opportunity to return to this subject, to answer his objections, and to provide more evidence, an evidence that shows that Fee’s interpretation of the Greek text is unnatural and defective.

The first two verses should be translated as:

“Now with regard to what you wrote to me about, it is better for a man not to touch a woman [i.e. not to marry]. However, on account of [your] sexual urges let each man have his own wife and each woman have her own husband [let each man and each woman get married]”.

³¹ Fee, “1 Corinthians 7:1-7 Revisited”, 212.

³² Caragounis, “‘Fornication’ and ‘Concession’?”, 554-59.