

Questions on Furnish, Sex: Marriage and Divorce

1. In which chapter of First Corinthians do Paul's principal comments of marriage and divorce occur?
2. What key belief does Furnish see as underlying all of the concerns that the Corinthians expressed in their letter to Paul (which he answers in chapters 7 and following)?
3. The arrogant Christians who claim for themselves spiritual wisdom, knowledge, and glory, have missed the point of one key event. What is that event?
4. What do the terms *libertine* and *ascetic* mean?
5. Which group (*libertines* or *ascetics*) probably used the slogan "All things are lawful"? (Paul quotes this slogan back to them in 1 Corinthians 6:12 and 10:23 in order to correct it by adding "but not all things are helpful.")
6. Which group (libertines or ascetics) probably used the slogan "It is better for a man not to touch a woman"? [Roetzel thinks Paul also used this slogan, but Furnish does not. Whether or not Paul used the slogan, it is clearly associated with one of the groups in the Corinthian church and not with the other. Which of the groups in the Corinthian church would have used the slogan?]
7. Did Paul think that it was ever okay for a married couple to abstain from sexual relations? If so, under what conditions was it permissible?
8. Why did Paul insist that sexual relations are required of both partners in marriage? (See 1 Corinthians 7:3—4.) What issue in the Corinthian church might have prompted such a response from Paul?
9. Under what circumstances did Paul allow divorce (and probably remarriage)? How could he do this after citing Jesus, prohibition against divorce? [Be prepared to discuss the views of Moses, Jesus, and Paul on this topic and the way the teaching changed over time. On what basis did Jesus revise the Law of Moses? On what basis did Paul state an exception to what Jesus had said? What is the core value that motivated all three of them? This issue was discussed in class, not in Furnish's book.]

10. In 1 Corinthians 7:12—13 Paul argues that marriages between a believer and an unbeliever should be maintained, not terminated, as long as the unbeliever consents to continue the marriage. On what basis does he make this argument? What does he say about whether or not the partners in such a marriage are “holy”?

11. In his conclusion, Furnish reminds his readers that in 1 Corinthians 7 Paul was addressing a specific question from the church at Corinth, not writing an essay on the nature of Christian marriage and divorce. Furnish then lists four things of value for the larger Christian community which may be found in Paul’s answer to the Corinthian problem. What are those four things, and why is each one important?