

Foreword

Two Rivers Church believes marriage is a God ordained covenant of faithfulness to be honored between one man and one woman for all of their lives.

God's purpose in marriage is to provide for our needs of companionship and intimacy, to grow and shape our individual character, to propagate healthy families, and thus a healthy society.

God hates divorce because it separates God's people physically, tears them apart emotionally, and harms them spiritually.

Because God holds marriage in such high esteem, Two Rivers Church also is committed to cherishing marriage, encouraging healthy relationships, and assisting in the healing of marriages.

In only one circumstance in scripture is divorce directed. This single directive is given when an unbeliever has determined to divorce their Christian spouse. In this circumstance the believing spouse is not to stand in the way of the unbeliever's determination to divorce.

The other discussion of divorce in scripture is within the context of marital infidelity. In this case, divorce is allowed for, but not commanded.

Divorce is a very serious matter. It must be clearly understood that the decision to pursue the dissolution of a marriage must ultimately be made before God, and the absolute responsibility for this decision is borne by the one who pursues this course of action. Due to the significance of this decision, members of Two Rivers Church contemplating divorce are directed to seek the guidance of either a Two Rivers Church counselor or pastor as the church desires to walk through this difficult issue with you.

Two Rivers Church is committed to investing its time and resources in the effort to walk out the healing and restoration of marriages. Our counsel will be to pursue healing and restoration of marriages.

In summary: At Two Rivers Church it is our commitment to encourage healthy marriages, to pursue reconciliation whenever possible, and to comfort the broken-hearted, all in a manner consistent with the spirit of Jesus Christ.

I. BIBLICAL TEACHING ON MARRIAGE

Marriage is a God ordained human institution. Genesis 1:27 says, "*God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.*" The very nature of the way God created man and woman indicates He intended man and woman for each other. It is the most basic of all human institutions and this relationship is intended by God to have the following characteristics.

A. Marriage is intended to be a companion relationship.

In Genesis 2:18 God declares, "*It is not good for the man to be alone*". The very first thing God saw in His creation that was not good was "aloneness." Thankfully He was not finished His creative process! Man was not created to survive in isolation. One of the most basic social and societal relationships is marriage. It was designed to meet our basic human social need for companionship and fellowship.

B. Marriage is intended to be a complementary relationship.

In Genesis 2:18 it asserts "*... I will make him a helper suitable for him.*" The first woman was a "helper suitable" for Adam. The woman was to be his counterpart, taken from his side, bone of his bone, and flesh of his flesh, his perfect complement. She was to be "fitted" for him emotionally, physically, spiritually, intellectually, morally, psychologically and in every other way. We also note that God did not make another man to be Adam's helper. He made woman. Marriage is intended to be the union of man and woman, not the union of two of the same sex.

C. Marriage is intended to be a committed relationship.

In Genesis 2:24 we read, *"For this reason a man shall leave his father and his mother, and be joined to his wife; and they shall become one flesh."* The commitment begins by the "leaving" of one relationship so that another may begin. When this verse is quoted in Matthew 19:5, a Greek word for "joined" is used which means, "to be glued to or be closely bound to." So then, God intends marriage to be a lifelong monogamous union.

While the Old Testament factually recognizes that polygamy did exist, it does not condone it. God's ideal from the beginning was, and is, a committed monogamous relationship. The O. T. notes that the first case of polygamy was in Cane's line. (Genesis 4:19). The Bible demonstrates that monogamy was always God's ideal (Psalm 128:3; Proverbs 5:18; 31:10-29; Ecclesiastes 9:9). Jesus also confirms this same truth in Matthew 19:8.

D. Marriage is intended to be a covenantal relationship.

A covenant is a solemn binding agreement between man and women witnessed to by both God and man. In Malachi 2:14 we read, *"Because the LORD has been a witness between you and the wife of your youth, against whom you have dealt treacherously, though she is your companion and your wife by covenant."* Proverbs 2:17 adds the following, *"That leaves the companion of her youth, and forgets the covenant of her God."*

Ezekiel applies the idea of this marriage covenant to the relationship between God and Israel. *"I also swore to you and entered into a covenant with you so that you became Mine"* --Ezekiel 16:8. From what is said we see that the husband "swore to" the wife (took an oath, pledged faith) and entered into a solemn covenant not intended to be broken.

The Hebrew word used, however, implies no sacrifice, thereby distinguishing it

from the word covenant used for the more sacred and binding "cutting of a covenant." The love involved is fundamentally the Hebrew word "Hesed," which means "a loyal, covenant keeping love," that God shows us even when we are unworthy. The Apostle Paul adds these words in I Corinthians 7:27, "*Are you bound to a wife? Do not seek to be released.*" The example of Hosea, the prophet, also indicates the degree of this covenantal commitment.

So, thus far, we have seen that marriage was intended by God to be a committed, complimentary, covenant of companionship.

E. Marriage is intended to be a conjugal relationship.

In Genesis 2:24 we read, "*For this reason a man shall leave his father and his mother, and be joined to his wife; and they shall become one flesh.*" Sexual union between the husband and wife seals the covenant made between them, and is a continuous reminder of that covenantal relationship. It is important to note that sex is not tantamount to marriage in spite of many who would confuse any conjugal act with the covenant of marriage.

In support of this view that sex does not constitute marriage, Paul asserts in 1 Thessalonians 4:3-6 ("*For this is the will of God, your sanctification; that is, that you abstain from sexual immorality; that each of you know how to possess his own vessel in sanctification and honor, not in lustful passion, like the Gentiles who do not know God; and that no man transgress and defraud his brother in the matter*") label this act as "defrauding" the future brother or sister who shall marry the partner who has been used? In this passage, why does not Paul just simply declare this couple married?

I Corinthians 6:16-18 says, "*Or do you not know that the one who joins himself to a prostitute, is one body with her? For He says, 'THE TWO SHALL BECOME*

ONE FLESH." *But the one who joins himself to the Lord is one spirit with Him. Flee immorality.*" This passage does not equate going to a harlot as equivalent to getting married. Instead, it calls it immorality.

Hebrews 13:4 distinguishes between marriage, fornication and adultery. It says, *"Marriage is to be held in honor among all, and the marriage bed is to be undefiled; for fornicators and adulterers God will judge."* This is possible, in part, because sex does not, in itself, constitute marriage. The sexual relationship within the context of marriage is honorable and the bed undefiled.

F. Marriage is intended to be a contractual relationship.

This is the legal aspect of marriage in which the laws of the land formally recognize the covenantal relationship that is being entered into, or was entered into, by the man and the woman. It is the formal recognition by the state, and/or the nation, of the binding agreement made between the two parties.

It is important to note that the breaking of the contract is also a violation of the covenantal agreement witnessed to by God. It is for this reason that God stated in Malachi 2:14-16 that He hates divorce. *"Yet you say, 'For what reason?' Because the LORD has been a witness between you and the wife of your youth, against whom you have dealt treacherously, though she is your companion and your wife by covenant. But not one has done so who has a remnant of the Spirit. And what did that one do while he was seeking a godly offspring? Take heed then to your spirit, and let no one deal treacherously against the wife of your youth. 'For I hate divorce,' says the LORD, the God of Israel"*

Jesus Himself reinforces this truth when he states in Matthew 19:6, *"So they are no longer two, but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let no man separate."* From this verse, it is evident that divorce was not in God's original intention for man. God's intention in marriage is for a couple to remain

together until death. Divorce is a legal word dissolving the legal contract of marriage, but not necessarily dissolving the covenant of marriage.

So to summarize the Scriptures teaching on marriage, we can say that it is a divinely established institution for man's welfare that contains three fundamental elements.

- First, it is a **covenant of companionship** between a man and a woman that is intended by God to be complimentary and committed.
- Second, it is the **sexual joining** of two persons so that the two become one flesh and is, therefore, honorable to the Lord.
- Third, it is a **legal, contractual relationship** between a man and a woman that is authorized by the laws of the land.

When all three of these elements have occurred, then a marriage has occurred in the eyes of the Lord. It takes all three to exist before a marriage can exist. This is how the Bible defines a marriage.

II. BIBLICAL TEACHING ON DIVORCE

A. Old Testament teaching on divorce.

The central passage in the Old Testament dealing with the subject of divorce, is found in Deuteronomy 24:1-4. It says:

"When a man takes a wife and marries her, and it happens that she finds no favor in his eyes because he has found some indecency in her, and he writes her a certificate of divorce and puts it in her hand and sends her out from his house, and she leaves his house and goes and becomes another man's wife, and if the latter husband turns against her and writes her a certificate of divorce and puts it in her hand and sends her out of his house, or if the latter husband dies who took her to be his wife, then her former husband who sent her away is not allowed to take her again to be his wife, since she has been defiled; for that is an abomination before the LORD, and you shall not bring sin on the land which the LORD your God gives you as an inheritance."

From the time of Moses to the time of Jesus, the Old Testament Jewish scholars developed widely divergent views concerning legitimate "causes" for divorce. Ultimately, two schools of thought arose around the meaning of the words in verse 1, "has found some indecency in her". The liberal school of Hillel permitted divorce for "any cause," even such minor offenses as "burning the toast." The conservative school of Shammai permitted divorce only for sexual infidelity.

In their confrontation with Jesus on the question of divorce (found in Matthew 19: 7-8 which says, *"They said to Him, " Why then did Moses command to GIVE HER A CERTIFICATE OF DIVORCE AND SEND HER AWAY?" He said to them, "Because of your hardness of heart Moses permitted you to divorce your wives; but from the beginning it has not been this way."*), the Pharisees were obviously

in error when they said that Moses commanded a man to give a certificate of divorce when sending his wife away (divorcing her). Jesus indicated that Moses only "suffered" or permitted them to do so, and then, not for "every cause" as was commonly practiced at that time.

The Hebrew language Moses used in Deuteronomy 24:1-4, as quoted above, is a simple sequence that does not command divorce. He just recognizes that men were divorcing their wives.

There are four important truths taught in Deuteronomy 24 about divorce.

1. Divorce was permitted on the grounds of "*indecenty*" indicated in Deuteronomy 24:1.

This word "indecenty" may not refer to adultery because the law provided that the adulterer be stoned (Deuteronomy 22:22). But the woman who is guilty of "indecenty" is not stoned, but is set free to go her way and remarry.

The Hebrew expression "indecenty" is used in Deuteronomy 23:12-14 to refer to uncovered excrement in Genesis 9:21-23 to Noah's nakedness; and in Lamentations 4:21 to Edom being under the figure of a drunken woman. While the meaning of the word "indecenty" is not entirely clear, it apparently refers to some sexual uncleanness or sexually inappropriate behavior apart from adultery. And as previously indicated, it was over this word that the two different schools of Hillel and Shammai developed. What improper behavior was serious enough to cause a man to give his wife a certificate of divorce? While we are not sure of the answer to that question, Christ seems to clarify the issue by stating that immorality ("porneia") was the only cause and therefore lends support to the position that it was something sexually inappropriate.

2. The person who is divorced could remarry – Deuteronomy 24:2.

It is interesting to note that the controversy over divorce in Jewish circles up to the time of Christ, centered on the "cause" of divorce, whereas the focus of the evangelical community today is often on the question of "remarriage." The Jewish community never questioned the right to remarry once divorce occurred. For them, the very idea of divorce implied the right to remarry. The evangelical community, on the other hand, has often forbidden remarriage, but do not question the right to divorce under certain circumstances. Deuteronomy 24:2 proves that divorce dissolves a marriage and gives the right to remarry. It does not require remarriage but grants the right if the party wishes to do so.

3. The third truth in Deuteronomy 24 is that remarriage to the first partner is banned after a remarriage takes place – Deuteronomy 24:3,

If she is divorced by her first husband, and then is divorced by her second husband, she cannot go back to the first husband, though the law would allow her to take a third husband. There is a good reason for this stipulation. It is a warning to a man that he had better not divorce his wife in the heat of anger, for he may later find that he has lost a good thing, and will not be able to gain her back. This seems to be an indication in Scripture of what we call "a cooling off period." In other words, a man is to think twice before he divorces his wife even for what seems to be a good reason. He might want her back, but if she has married again, he cannot have her.

4. The fourth truth in Deuteronomy 24 is that the divorce process involves a breaking of all three of the key elements that originally constituted a marriage.

Concerning the first key element, a covenant of companionship, there involved an overt expression of the breaking of this covenant. We know that the man was to write out a statement indicating that he was divorcing her and "*puts it in her hand and sends her out from his house*". In the opposite way that he took

her hand and brought her into his house, he now formally and overtly breaks the covenant and rejects her companionship by sending her away.

Concerning the second key element, the sexual union of the two persons, we read that the reason for the divorce must be that there was found in her something "indecent". And as we have noted above, this is probably some sort of sexually inappropriate behavior, as Jesus later indicated. Just as sexual union was a key element in the making of the marriage, sexual inappropriate behavior had the ability to dissolve the marriage.

Concerning the third key element, the execution of a legal agreement, in Old Testament times, the writing of the divorce decree and placing it in the hand of the spouse was done most often in the gates of the city where the legal transactions took place. Through this very public and formal act, the legal, contractual element of the marriage was broken in a way prescribed by the laws of the land.

B. New Testament teaching on divorce.

1. Jesus forbids divorce as contrary to God's will and the Scriptures.

He made this clear in Mark 10:6-9 and the parallel passage in Matthew 19:5 & 6 which says, *"and said, 'FOR THIS REASON A MAN SHALL LEAVE HIS FATHER AND MOTHER AND BE JOINED TO HIS WIFE, AND THE TWO SHALL BECOME ONE FLESH'? 'So they are no longer two, but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let no man separate.'"* Jesus clearly stated the Father's heart when he said, *"What therefore God has joined together, let no man separate."*

2. The Apostle Paul also forbids a Christian couple to get a divorce.

In I Corinthians 7:10-11 Paul writes, *"But to the married I give instructions, not I, but the Lord, that the wife should not leave her husband (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."* Although Paul recognized that Christians were getting divorces, he urges for reconciliation.

3. The Apostle Paul also forbids Christians to take the initiative in getting a divorce because their partner is an unbeliever.

"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. And a woman who has an unbelieving husband, and he consents to live with her, she must not send her husband away. 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." I Corinthians 7:12-15. Thus, the Apostle Paul indicates the Christian cannot stop an unbelieving partner from leaving (getting a divorce) if he, or she insists on it. In other words, if it is irreconcilable and a divorce occurs, the marriage is dissolved.

4. Jesus permitted a Christian to initiate a divorce when there was immorality (porneia).

"It was said, 'WHOEVER SENDS HIS WIFE AWAY, LET HIM GIVE HER A CERTIFICATE OF DIVORCE; but I say to you that everyone who divorces his wife, except for the reason of unchastity, makes her commit adultery; and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery.'" -- Matthew 5:31-32. Again, he teaches this in Matthew 19:9, "And I say to you, whoever divorces his wife, except for immorality, and marries another woman commits adultery." This is permission, however, not a command.

The Greek word for unchastity and immorality in the above two passages is the same word. It is "porneia" and may include an act or repeated acts of immorality, but usually means habitual sexual immorality of any kind both before and after marriage. (A porne was a prostitute.) "Porneia" is the Greek word from which we derive the word pornography. A few scholars would limit the meaning of fornication here to incest, but this is not the normal usage of the word. "Porneia" cannot be limited only to sexual acts between unmarried partners.

The following are some examples of how the word is used in the Scriptures.

John 8:41 *"They said to Him, "We were not born of fornication; we have one Father: God."*

Acts 15:28f *"For it seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us to lay upon you no greater burden than these essentials: that you abstain from things sacrificed to idols and from blood and from things strangled and from fornication; if you keep yourselves free from such things, you will do well. Farewell."*

Acts 21:25 *"But concerning the Gentiles who have believed, we wrote, having decided that they should abstain from meat sacrificed to idols and from blood and from what is strangled and from fornication."*

I Corinthians 5:1 *"It is actually reported that there is immorality among you, and immorality of such a kind as does not exist even among the Gentiles, that someone has his father's wife."*

I Corinthians 6:9f *"Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived; neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor homosexuals, nor thieves, nor the covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers, will inherit the kingdom of God."*

I Corinthians 6:13 *"Food is for the stomach and the stomach is for food, but God will do away with both of them. Yet the body is not for immorality, but for the Lord, and the Lord is for the body."*

I Corinthians 6:16f *"Or do you not know that the one who joins himself to a prostitute is one body with her? For He says, "THE TWO SHALL BECOME ONE FLESH." But the one who joins himself to the Lord is one spirit with Him. Flee immorality. Every other sin that a man commits is outside the body, but the immoral man sins against his own body."*

I Corinthians 7:1f *"Now concerning the things about which you wrote, it is good for a man not to touch a woman. But because of immoralities, each man is to have his own wife, and each woman is to have her own husband."*

2 Corinthians 12:21 *"I am afraid that when I come again my God may humiliate me before you, and I may mourn over many of those who have sinned in the past and not repented of the impurity, immorality and sensuality which they have practiced."*

Gal 5:19-21 *"Now the deeds of the flesh are evident, which are: immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of*

anger, disputes, dissensions, factions, envying, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these, of which I forewarn you, just as I have forewarned you, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God."

Ephesians 5:3, 5 *"But immorality or any impurity or greed must not even be named among you, as is proper among saints"... "For this you know with certainty, that no immoral or impure person or covetous man, who is an idolater, has an inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God."*

Colossians 3:5 *"Therefore consider the members of your earthly body as dead to immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and greed, which amounts to idolatry."*

Revelation 2:20f *"But I have this against you, that you tolerate the woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess, and she teaches and leads My bond-servants astray so that they commit acts of immorality and eat things sacrificed to idols. I gave her time to repent, and she does not want to repent of her immorality"*

Revelation 9:20f *"The rest of mankind, who were not killed by these plagues, did not repent of the works of their hands, so as not to worship demons, and the idols of gold and of silver and of brass and of stone and of wood, which can neither see nor hear nor walk; 21 and they did not repent of their murders nor of their sorceries nor of their immorality nor of their thefts."*

Revelation 21:8 *"But for the cowardly and unbelieving and abominable and murderers and immoral persons and sorcerers and idolaters and all liars, their part will be in the lake that burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death."*

Thus in the New Testament and the classical Greek writings the word means

unchastity, prostitution, fornication, adultery, incest, all kinds of lewdness and inappropriate sexual behavior. Thus, this exception clause of Matthew 19 embraces all types of illicit sexual behavior including adultery.

Also, we must acknowledge that Mark and Luke were written to Gentile and Greeks who already widely viewed and accepted "porneia" as grounds for divorce. Therefore, it is natural that this exception clause not be included in writings to them.

5. Jesus seems to condemn the remarriage of divorced persons under other circumstances, except porneia.

While the law in Deuteronomy 24 provides for remarriage of divorced persons, Jesus condemns remarriage as an act of adultery and a sin against the covenant of the first marriage. Mark 10:11-12 says, *"And He said to them, "Whoever divorces his wife and marries another woman commits adultery against her; and if she herself divorces her husband and marries another man, she is committing adultery."* Luke 16:18 says, *"Everyone who divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery, and he who marries one who is divorced from a husband commits adultery."* See also Matthew 5:32 and Matthew 9:9 that we have discussed before.

From the viewpoint of Jesus, the basic culprit was divorce itself. Jesus saw that divorced persons could be expected to remarry. He states that the remarriage of divorced persons causes them to commit adultery. Thus, the basic purpose in what Jesus says is to prevent divorce in the first place.

In Matthew 5:32 an exceptive clause is added. *"but I say to you that everyone who divorces his wife, except for the reason of unchastity, makes her commit adultery; and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery."* This shows that a husband who divorces a sexually faithful wife causes her to commit

adultery if she remarries. The husband who divorces a sexually immoral wife does not cause her to commit adultery, since she is already guilty of adultery.

In Matthew 19:9, we also have an exceptive clause. In this verse, the best manuscripts read, *"And I say to you, whoever divorces his wife, except for immorality, and marries another woman commits adultery."* It must be emphasized that the exception has in view repeated sexual immorality, not a single act, although a single act would qualify as "porneia". Wherever possible, sexually immoral practices should be dealt with through repentance, confession, forgiveness, and reconciliation, thus salvaging the marriage itself.

The exceptive clause of Matthew 5:32 and Matthew 19:9 clearly indicates that where the mate has practiced immorality (porneia) and a divorce occurs, the faithful partner has the right to remarry. Jesus teaches here that while divorce dissolves the contract, habitual immorality dissolves the covenant and therefore gives the faithful partner an opportunity to remarry. Jesus does not command remarriage.

However, it is clear from Matthew 19:9 that Jesus anticipated that a remarriage will take place. The verse deals with divorce and remarriage and the law of grammar makes the exceptive clause apply to both. The Greek word for "put away" (apoluo) is used with regard to divorce in the Deuteronomy passages referred to in Matthew 5:31 and Mark 10:1-12. There, the "putting away" clearly did dissolve the marriage bond. By His statements, Jesus did not change the nature of divorce- it does dissolve the marriage. Jesus simply threw out all excuses, reasons, or causes except for "immorality" (porneia). However, in no case does He command either divorce or remarriage. They are merely permitted under this one condition.

6. In Paul's teaching on divorce in I Corinthians 7:15 there is also an exception made.

"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." The expression "not under bondage" is very strong. Romans 7:2 says, *"For the married woman is bound by law to her husband while he is living; but if her husband dies, she is released from the law concerning the husband. So then, if while her husband is living she is joined to another man, she shall be called an adulteress; but if her husband dies, she is free from the law, so that she is not an adulteress though she is joined to another man."*) that death alone can dissolve a marriage, interpret this passage to mean that the Christian is free to let the unbelieving partner go, but not free to remarry.

If a believer is "not under bondage" when an unbelieving spouse, unwilling to remain in the marriage, divorces him (or her), he(or she) must be considered set free. Since it is the unbelieving partner who determines to go and initiates a divorce, the believer's freedom seems to be more than a freedom to let him (or her) go, since he (or she) is going anyway. The plain meaning is that the believer is set free to marry if he or she so chooses. Again, remarriage is not commanded.

Paul, however, does discourage remarriage for the sake of ministering to the Lord. "Are you free from a wife, seek not a wife Yet, if you marry, you have not sinned." I Corinthians 7:27, 28.

7. When a divorce and a remarriage occurs, is the offending party living in a perpetual state of adultery?

Some have argued so. A remarriage, which is entered into wrongly, does indeed constitute an "act of adultery" against the previous covenant. This breaks the old covenant. The former partner is set free. Once a person remarries, he is then

obligated to be faithful to the new covenant. Deuteronomy 4 shows it to be wrong to go back to the old marriage covenant, although Hosea was later commanded to do so, as an illustration of the love of God that would take back apostate Israel. So then, while the offending party who remarries does commit an "act of adultery," forgiveness is available and that new relationship is not to be considered a continuous adulterous relationship.

The Bible shows that God expects contracts to be kept even when entered into wrongly. When Joshua wrongly entered into a contract with the Gibeonites, God not only expected him to fulfill it, he gave him miracles of a hailstone and the long day to help him do so. (Joshua 9 & 10)

In summary therefore, let us make the following observations about the teaching of divorce and remarriage in the Bible.

The Bible allows for (but does not require) divorce on two grounds:

1. The first reason is immorality involving illicit sexual acts and practice. Matthew 5:32: 19:1-9.

The exception clause in Matthews Gospel is part of the best manuscripts. It is not limited to the Jews only as a corrective to their mishandling of Deuteronomy 24:1-4. In this passage, porneia refers to immorality that could occur both before and after marriage. While "mokeia" (adultery) is consistently used in the New Testament (Luke 18:11; John 8:3; I Corinthians 6:9; Hebrews 13:4) to denote illicit intercourse with someone else's spouse, "porneia" cannot be limited only to sexual acts between unmarried partners. As we have stated before, the exception clause embraces all types of illicit sexual behavior including adultery.

The word "divorce" used by our Lord in Matthew 5:32; 19:9; Mark 10:11

& 12; and Luke 16:18 is always "apolyein". This same word is used of Mary in Matthew 1:19 - "to divorce." This meaning has been positively identified now from AD 124 Murabbacat Cave II Scroll. This is not a "putting" or "sending away" but a divorce that is in view.

2. The second reason for a Biblical divorce is willful, final and irreconcilable desertion by an unbeliever.

In I Corinthians 7:15, Paul states that willful and final desertion of a believer by an unbeliever equals divorce. While this goes beyond Jesus' teaching on the subject and is specifically admitted by Paul, what he says is also revelational in its character (I Corinthians 7:10, 12).

If an unbelieving partner willfully abandons his believing marriage partner and insists on "separation", that believer "is not bound" (I Corinthians 7:15; cf. vs 27, 39 and Romans 7:2 where the word "bound" is used by Paul to indicate the permanency of a marriage).

Thus if the unbeliever demands a divorce, the believer may consent; they are not bound. The teaching of Paul therefore is very clear: believers are not to "separate" their marriage covenant, but should the unbelieving spouse insist on divorcing the believing spouse the believer is not bound but is set free to remarry.

In these two Biblical cases where divorce is allowed, the marriage is terminated and the unoffending believer is granted the privilege of remarriage, though it is not commanded. In both cases, remarriage is implied. Jesus said, "And whoever marries her." while Paul implies the right of remarriage (I Corinthians 7).

Finally, it should be noted that although Two Rivers Church is in full agreement with the above stated principles regarding marriage, divorce and remarriage, we

recognize that not all questions regarding the Bible's teaching on divorce and remarriage are answered by the above.

III. SUMMARY

1. Two Rivers Church believes marriage is a God ordained covenant of faithfulness to be honored between one man and one woman for all of their lives.
2. God's purpose in marriage is to provide for our needs of companionship and intimacy, to grow and shape our individual character, to propagate healthy families, and thus a healthy society.
3. God hates divorce because it separates God's people physically, tears them apart emotionally, and harms them spiritually.
4. Because God holds marriage in such high esteem, Two Rivers Church also is committed to cherishing marriage, encouraging healthy relationships, and assisting in the healing of marriages.
5. In only one circumstance in scripture is divorce directed. This single directive is given when an unbeliever has determined to divorce their Christian spouse. In this circumstance the believing spouse is not to stand in the way of the unbeliever's determination to divorce.
6. The other discussion of divorce in scripture is within the context of marital infidelity. In this case, divorce is allowed for, but not commanded.
7. Divorce is a very serious matter. It must be clearly understood that the decision to pursue the dissolution of a marriage must ultimately be made before God, and the absolute responsibility for this decision is borne by the one who pursues this course of action. Due to the significance of this decision, members of Two Rivers Church contemplating divorce are directed to seek the guidance of either a Two Rivers Church Pastor or recommended counselor as the church desires to walk through this difficult issue with you.

8. Two Rivers Church is committed to investing its time and resources in the effort to walk out the healing and restoration of marriages. Our counsel will be to pursue healing and restoration of marriages. It is always His heart to see marriage partners grow in His grace and be reconciled to each other.

9. At Two Rivers Church it is our commitment to encourage healthy marriages, to pursue reconciliation whenever possible, and to comfort the broken-hearted, all in a manner consistent with the spirit of Jesus Christ.

The preceding was taken almost entirely (except section III) from a paper officially adopted in 1979 by the Ministerial Standing Committee of the Evangelical Free Church of America and written at their request by Dr. Walter Kaiser of Trinity Evangelical Divinity School.