

Choosing To Have A Good Relationship

Purpose of Marriage

Martin G. Collins

Given 16-Dec-00; Sermon #479

Sue and I will be celebrating our twenty-fifth wedding anniversary on December 28; and it has been a wonderful twenty-five years. As we approach what has become known as our "silver anniversary," I have been pondering the purpose of marriage, and what makes it successful, and how it applies to the Bride of Christ.

Twenty-five years did not used to be all that long; and Paul Harvey is still able to find a few couples, each day, to congratulate for being married more than seventy years. Nevertheless, he is having a harder and harder time finding those couples. (It seems like there are less and less out there, all the time.)

Now in Britain, for example, the average marriage lasts nine years and ten months. What a sad, sad story that is. Success in marriage has become a grim prospect. 61% of unmarried men want to "tie the knot," compared to just 37% of single women. I cannot help but wonder if that is not because of bad publicity that the Feminist Movement has made upon men—that all men are criminals and wife-beaters. But less than half as many unmarried women (as men) want to get married. That is very, very sad.

The Bible shows marriage as the primary bond of society—the foundation of social life. Prior to a society, there must be families. And before a family, there exists a marriage. From the beginning, marriage was a bond between two people (a male and a female). When we think of Bible images of marriage, we think first of the famous couples of the Bible. Some may have already come to your minds. We think of Adam and Eve, Abraham and Sarah, Isaac and Rebekah, Jacob and Rachel, Ruth and Boaz, Esther and the king, and Joseph and Mary.

From the Bible's descriptions of such couples (along with passages of clear teaching about marriage), we receive an expanded picture of what marriage is. This includes its basic components, which are: (1) divine institution, (2) companionship, (3) romantic relationship, (4) sexual union, (5) covenant, (6) joint livelihood, (7) parenting, and (8) a shared relationship with Jesus Christ and the Father. So marriages are quite involved and quite complicated. And the foundation on which all additional images of marriages are placed is the basic principle that ***"in marriage, two become one."***

Matthew 19:3-6 The Pharisees also came to Him, testing Him, and saying to Him, "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for just any reason?" And He

Choosing to Have a Good Relationship by Martin G. Collins (<http://www.cgg.org>)

answered and said unto them, "Have you not read that He who made them at the beginning 'made them male and female.' [We see that it was God who instituted it.] 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 then, they are no longer two but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let not man separate." [Or, "put asunder" KJV]

The biblical imagery of **joining** accordingly plays a central role in the purpose of marriage. Husband and wife are joined together by God. The general framework in which the Bible places marriage is *an institution by God*. Marriage was God's idea for the human race—to teach us the type of relationship that the church will have with Christ.

Notice the first, original, fundamental, basic rule of all in the husband/wife and family relationship. When God first created man on earth, He ordained the marriage union. The marriage and family institution is basic in God's purpose for man. Human beings and marriage were thus created together.

Marriage was not instituted by man, nor by authority of a man-made legislative body (or law-making body), nor by laws promulgated by a human constituted legislature (or law-making body). It was *not* instituted by any physical entity!

Genesis 2:18-21 And the LOORD God said, "It is not good that man should be alone; I will make him a helper comparable to him." Out of the ground the LOORD God formed every beast of the field and every bird of the air, and brought them to Adam to see what he would call them. And whatever Adam called each living creature, that was its name. So Adam gave names to all cattle, to the birds of the air, and to every beast of the field. But for Adam there was not found a helper comparable to him. And the LOORD God caused a deep sleep to fall on Adam, and he slept; and He took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh in its place.

So it is *God* who brought Eve to Adam, after creating her. In effect, He was pronouncing the first marriage union in the history of mankind.

Genesis 2:22-24 Then the rib which the LOORD God had taken from man He made into a woman [So we see God's direct hand in that.], and He [God] brought her to the man. And Adam said: "This is now bone of my bones and

Choosing to Have a Good Relationship by Martin G. Collins (<http://www.cgg.org>)

flesh of my flesh. She shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man." Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall be one flesh.

As you can see there, after marriage there are no longer two people in a natural or spiritual sense. Rather, they are "one flesh"—one unit. God is a Family of Persons; and He is reproducing Himself. Faithfulness in marriage and the family relationship is the reason for man. The purpose for the marriage relationship is so that we may ultimately enter God's Kingdom. Thus, the marriage relationship is a very, very important relationship!

God is the divine Family. The family relationship of man is a husband and a wife relationship, and that demands faithfulness to the matrimonial bond. Human marriage is the "type" of the divine marriage setting of God's Kingdom on earth. So it is extremely important that it be done correctly, and properly.

God is consistent. He does not ordain faithfulness forever in our marriage to Christ and then prepare us for that marriage by ordaining unfaithfulness. He is not contradictory, in that sense. So divorce and remarriage, during this preparatory period—He does not prepare us that way. He prepares us for successful marriages. That is why it is so important, before marriage, to choose the right mate (and not just jump into it, strictly by emotion).

The "typical" reason for the marriage relationship in this human life is to prepare us—by faithfulness now—for that eternal faithful marriage state then (in the future)—to constantly remind us of our sacred relationship to Christ, as a spouse, to the never-ending marriage to Him. That is, the eternal marriage. One of the most important purposes in our human lives now is that we learn the sanctity, the sacredness, and the permanency of the marriage bond. It cannot be emphasized enough how important that bond is.

Of course, God has not "willed" that every human must marry. We see that, and we know that. That is made clear in I Corinthians 7. The apostle Paul was not married. And even though it is God who said (in Genesis 2:18), "It is not good that man should be alone," it would be far better to live alone than to be yoked to what might be an unconverted, contentious, and hateful person. God desires peace in marriages, because the fruit of the Spirit is sown in peace. In order for the fruit of the Spirit to develop and grow, there must be *peace*. And we must have peace in our marriages for growth there.

Everyone should take marriage so seriously that a wrong marriage is not made in the first place. If this truth were known by all, there would be few "miss-mated" marriages. But this world does not have that truth, so there are many "miss-mated" marriages. There are many marriages that are formed because of the wrong reasons—because of emotion or lust. On the other hand, if this truth was more thoroughly realized by the whole world, marriage partners would try harder to make the marriages happy. But the divorce rate, as you know, is so high. I believe that one in three marriages end in divorce (and it may be higher than that, in some countries).

Ephesians 5:31 says, "For this reason. . ." That is, because of the coming divine marriage of the church to Christ. That is the reason. And in verse 27 it says:

Ephesians 5:27 That He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish.

So *for this reason* God ordained the marriage institution for humans now—so that we can understand and grow, and become a holy and unblemished spiritual church.

Throughout the Bible, God's relationship to His people is pictured as a marriage. In this metaphor, God is the Husband and His people are His wife. It is not that God is male or female, or that He is just "female" or that He is just "male." That is not the point. That is not the "type." The *type* of the marriage is that He is the Head of the household. So, within the marriage metaphor, it is understandable that God is cast in the role of a husband.

Malachi speaks of marriage as a covenant. In Malachi 2:14, he says, "wife by covenant." The relationship is built on mutual love but expressed in a legal form. That is the way that Malachi expresses it. Israel's relationship with God in the Old Testament is also covenantal, as witnessed in the book of Exodus. We find the old covenant marriage agreement in three primary places in the Old Testament. One place is Exodus 19:5-8 and also Exodus 24:7. It is found in Jeremiah 31:32, and it is also found in Ezekiel 16:8.

When Israel broke its covenant with God, it was equated with breaking the marriage bond. So throughout the Old Testament you see the marriage covenant (and bond) interwoven with the idolatry that Israel went through.

Hosea was one of the first to use the marriage metaphor, when he describes the alienation between Israel and God as a break in their marriage vows. God commanded

Choosing to Have a Good Relationship by Martin G. Collins (<http://www.cgg.org>)

Hosea to marry an adulterous wife.

Hosea 2:1-2 "Say to your brethren, 'My people,' and to your sisters, 'Mercy is shown.' Bring charges against your mother, bring charges; for she is not My wife, nor am I her Husband! Let her put away her harlotries [her unfaithfulness] from her sight, and her adulteries from between her breasts."

This is one place where Israel's association and covenant with God is shown as being a type of a marriage.

Now, the prophet Ezekiel developed the metaphor of marriage as a spiritual symbol to its greatest extent. He dedicated two long chapters to recounting the perversity of Israel's relationship to God, using sexual terms. I want to illustrate Ezekiel's argument with Ezekiel 23. Ezekiel describes two sisters. He identifies the first (Oholah) with Samaria, and the second (Oholibah) with Jerusalem. These sisters became prostitutes in Egypt.

God then complains that Oholah lusted after Assyrian soldiers. This, of course, is symbolizing the foreign religious beliefs that Israel had taken under their wing, and started to caress and use themselves. Even when Hosea was still married to her, she was still committing adultery and lusting after the Assyrian soldiers. As a result, he simply gave her to them. In other words, he gave her over to sin. They humiliated her, and then they killed her. So here in Ezekiel 23 we will see God's words having to do with this unfaithful relationship.

Ezekiel 23:5-6 "Oholah played the harlot even though she was Mine; and she lusted for her lovers, the neighboring Assyrians, who were clothed in purple, captains and rulers, all of them desirable young men, horsemen riding on horses.

So we see there that, for Israel, the other countries looked enticing. They looked somewhat pleasant—as some see Christmas today. Many of our children look at the lights and they think, "Oh, it's so pleasant." But that is the way Satan deceives with his false religions. Well, the same thing was happening to Israel. They were looking at the heathen countries and thinking, "Oh, they're having a nicer time than we are." Or, "They have better beliefs than we do." So they were absorbing them and, in that sense, committing spiritual harlotry.

Choosing to Have a Good Relationship by Martin G. Collins (<http://www.cgg.org>)

Ezekiel 23:7-10 "Thus she committed her harlotry with them, all of them choice men of Assyria; and with all for whom she lusted, with all their idols, she defiled herself. She has never given up her harlotry brought from Egypt. For in her youth they had lain with her, pressed her virgin bosom, and poured out their immortality upon her. Therefore I have delivered her into the hand of her lovers, into the hand of the Assyrians, for whom she lusted. They uncovered her nakedness, took away her sons and daughters, and slew her with the sword. She became a byword among women, for they had executed judgment on her.

In our modern-day country of the United States (descendants of Israel), today we are seeing the same things happening. The United States is being replaced by foreign religions—by eastern religions and other types of religions—as well as ways. So we see an *unfaithfulness to God*; and, in a sense, we see a harlotry. That is, spiritual harlotry (or, spiritual adultery).

Oholibah did not learn a lesson from her sister's fate. Rather, she found herself attracted to the Babylonians. That is, the foreign religious beliefs of those countries. Her rejection of the marriage bed—or the covenant that Israel had with God—was intense; and, in the end, God judged Oholibah (His unfaithful wife) as He did Oholah.

Other prophets also expressed the resemblance of Israel's unfaithfulness towards the marriage covenant. In Jeremiah, God remembered when His relationship with Israel was good. He used terms, like "devotion," to express her faithfulness to Him.

Jeremiah 2:1-2a Moreover the word of the LORD came to me, saying, "Go and cry in the hearing of Jerusalem, saying, 'Thus says the LORD: "I remember you, the kindness of your youth."

Remember that Israel's "youth" was back when she was wandering for forty years. That is, when she was going through the period of Joshua and the period of the Judges. That was the "youth" of Israel. And then as she "grew up" (at least "grew up in sin," so to speak), she was no longer kind, no longer considerate, no longer loving of God.

Jeremiah 2:2b The love of your betrothal, when you went after Me in the wilderness, in a land not sown.

Choosing to Have a Good Relationship by Martin G. Collins (<http://www.cgg.org>)

Later, Israel committed spiritual adultery. Adultery is **idolatry**, as Jeremiah 3 makes clear.

Jeremiah 3:6-9 The LOORD said also to me in the days of Josiah the king: "Have you seen what backsliding [or, faithless] Israel has done? She has gone up on every high mountain and under every green tree, and there played the harlot. [That is, committed adultery. Or, chased after earthly religions.] And I said, after she had done all these things, 'Return to Me.' But she did not return. And her treacherous sister Judah saw it. Then I saw that for all the causes for which backsliding Israel had committed adultery, I had put her away and given her a certificate of divorce; yet her treacherous sister Judah did not fear, but went and played the harlot also. So it came to pass, through her casual harlotry, that she defiled the land and committed adultery with stones and trees."

So there you see the earth/environmental type of religion.

Jeremiah 3:10 And yet for all this her treacherous sister Judah has not turned to Me with her whole heart, but in pretense," says the LOORD.

So, although she made an effort or "made an appearance" to be obedient to God, it was only by *pretense*. Her heart was not with God.

Jeremiah 3:11 Then the LOORD said to me, "Backsliding Israel has shown herself more righteous than treacherous Judah.

When backsliding Israel went for the other religious beliefs, it went hog-wild; but Judah had the pretense—or tried to make it look like they were still obedient to God (although they were not).

Jeremiah 3:13-14 Only acknowledge your iniquity that you have transgressed against the LOORD your God, and have scattered your charms to alien deities under every green tree, and you have not obeyed My voice,' says the LOORD. "Return, O backsliding children," says the LOORD; "for I am married to you. I will take you, one from a city and two from a family, and I will bring you to Zion."

So we can see that very commonly, throughout the prophets, they speak of nations and equate it to a marriage covenant. Isaiah too had made the connection between *idolatry* and *adultery*. It is recorded in Isaiah 50:1 that God divorced His wife, Israel, because of her adultery. However, Isaiah also speaks of Israel's future salvation as a restoration of the marriage relationship.

Isaiah 54:5-8 "For your Maker is your husband. The LORD of hosts is His name; and your Redeemer is the Holy One of Israel. He is called the God of the whole earth. For the LORD has called you like a woman forsaken and grieved in spirit, like a youthful wife when you were refused," says your God. "For a mere moment I have forsaken you, but with great mercies I will gather you. With a little wrath I hid My face from you for a moment; but with everlasting kindness I will have mercy on you," says the LORD, your Redeemer.

Actually, the whole of Isaiah 54 speaks of this. In verse 10, the "*covenant of peace*" is mentioned; and it connects it with the marriage covenant. So all marriages must be nurtured in peace. That goes with nations as well. In order for nations to have a good relationship with God, there must be peace involved.

The prophets expressed the marriage metaphor most dramatically, but the principle can be discerned elsewhere in the Old Testament as well. In the first five books of the Bible, we read of God's jealousy. That is an emotion that is only proper to an exclusive relationship—like marriage. This is mentioned in Exodus 19:3-6, as well as other places in the book of Exodus. Also, Israel's rebellion is described as *adultery* and *prostitution* in Exodus 34:15-16. Thus, there were various ways in which rebellion and unfaithfulness are expressed.

The use of the marriage relationship between God and His people continues in the New Testament. We will see that in II Corinthians 11. The apostle Paul was concerned for the Corinthians about this faithlessness that was causing spiritual adultery. He said that the Corinthians may tolerate this spiritual adultery; but he was going to stop the false ministers who may try to make them lust after other doctrines. Paul was very concerned about this, and he was very strong in his statements about this.

II Corinthians 11:1-4 Oh, that you would bear with me in a little folly—and indeed you do bear with me. For I am jealous for you with godly jealousy. For I have betrothed you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ. But I fear, lest somehow, as the serpent deceived Eve by his

Choosing to Have a Good Relationship by Martin G. Collins (<http://www.cgg.org>)

craftiness, so your minds may be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ. For if he who comes preaches another Jesus whom we have not preached, or if you receive a different spirit which you have not received, or a different gospel which you have not accepted—you may well put up with it!

II Corinthians 11:12-15 But what I do, I will also continue to do, that I may cut off the opportunity from those who desire an opportunity to be regarded just as we are in the things of which they boast. For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into apostles of Christ. And no wonder! For Satan himself transforms himself into an angel of light. Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also transform themselves into ministers of righteousness, whose end will be according to their works.

So Paul worked hard to make the church spiritually undefiled from the enticements of other religious beliefs—so that the church could marry Christ and be a chaste and pure virgin. He looked at the relationship as *an existing betrothal*. In biblical terms, a "betrothal" is almost the same as a marriage. A betrothal was the first step in marriage. It was already *a commitment of faithfulness*.

God's spiritual church—the betrothed Bride of Christ—is not limited to, or confined by, organizational or political lines as drawn by men. The different groups of the greater church of God have similar doctrines but different personalities. They have varying strengths and weaknesses. The emphasis might be different. But God has placed each individual in the group in which they will grow in character and understanding most effectively. But what has happened is that (with the splintering of Worldwide) people are misinterpreting God's truth, or they are totally missing the truth of God and are going off into different groups that are not part of the greater church of God. They are doing things like keeping Sunday, and keeping Christmas, and on and on and on.

It is interesting that Mr. Armstrong mentioned (I think it was in the early '80s) that he thought that maybe 50% of the church was not converted. They may have been called, but they were not chosen. We saw that to be more than true, as time went on. It is also interesting that, by about 1988, the Worldwide Church of God looked at the records and found that 50% of all of the members of the Worldwide Church of God had come into the church in the previous ten years (that is, the period through the eighties). So the turnover is enormous in the church of God, because "the called ones" do not always stay. They do not always **choose** to stay in obedience to God.

Choosing to Have a Good Relationship by Martin G. Collins (<http://www.cgg.org>)

In the book of Ephesians, Paul instructs Christians that wives submit to their husbands (as to Christ), and that husbands should love their wives with the sacrificial love that Christ has for the church. Please especially note verse 32.

Ephesians 5:22-32 Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the LORD. For the husband is head of the wife, as also Christ is head of the church; and He is the Savior of the body. Therefore, just as the church is subject to Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in everything. Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her, that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word. That He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish. So husbands ought to love their own wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as the LORD does the church. For we are members of His body, of His flesh and of His bones. "For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh." This is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the church.

The book of Revelation describes the end of history—when God will, once and for all, destroy all evil. His faithful people will be united with Him forever in glory; and, not surprisingly (considering the development of the marriage metaphor up to this point in the Bible), this final union between God and His people is described as a marriage.

Revelation 19:6-9 And I heard, as it were, the voice of a great multitude, as the sound of many waters, and as the sound of mighty thunderings, saying, "Alleluia! For the Lord God Omnipotent reigns! Let us be glad and rejoice and give Him glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and His wife has made herself ready." And to her it was granted to be arrayed in fine linen, clean and bright, for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints. Then he said to me, "Write: 'Blessed are those who are called to the marriage supper of the Lamb!'" And he said to me, "These are the true saying of God."

For the remainder of this sermon, I want you to concentrate on a specific point—that is, that we *choose* to have a good marriage. In his book, *Tough Choices*, Len Woods says that we have to *choose to have a good marriage*. This may seem quite obvious; but many people never make a decision to do anything constructive in their marriages. They

Choosing to Have a Good Relationship by Martin G. Collins (<http://www.cgg.org>)

never make that choice—that they are going to make it a success. They just want to be served, rather than serve others.

Len Woods mentions six choices we have to make in order to have a good marriage. These choices are also made in regard to our preparation to become the Bride of Christ. The benefits are present both (1) here and now, in our own marriages, and in our relationships with the brethren in the church and also (2) in our relationship with Jesus Christ.

The first point that he made (as far as us choosing to have a good marriage) is that *we choose to be committed to our spouse for better or for worse.*

According to British government statistics, the most important reasons for divorce are: infidelity, 31%; unreasonable behavior, 23%; growing apart, 18%; violence, 8%; alcohol, 3%; and a lack of respect for each other, in-law problems, and family problems, and a lack of money and financial problems (all together), 2%; and career pressures on the man, 1%.

So, by far, the most common reason is *infidelity*. Well, the same holds true for our spiritual relationship with God. More people leave the church because of spiritual infidelity than any other reason.

All marriages have ups and downs, good times and bad. It is a good thing too, because a life that is not changing and growing is not the kind of person that you want to spend a lifetime with. We need excitement. We need challenges. And we need to work hard at making successes of our marriages. The church is a dynamic entity. Paul praised the Corinthians for their kindness and big-heartedness in giving at a time of great distress.

II Corinthians 8:1-5 Moreover, brethren, we make known to you the grace of God bestowed on the churches of Macedonia: that in a great trial of affliction the abundance of their joy and their deep poverty abounded in the riches of their liberality. For I bear witness that according to their ability, yes, and beyond their ability, they were freely willing, imploring us with much urgency that we would receive the gift and the fellowship of the ministering to the saints. And not only as we had hoped, but they first gave themselves to the Lord, and then to us by the will of God.

Paul used the good example of the churches of Macedonia (that is, the churches of Philippi, Thessalonica, and Berea and others in the region of Macedonia) to exhort the

Choosing to Have a Good Relationship by Martin G. Collins (<http://www.cgg.org>)

Corinthians and the Christians in Acacia to the good work of charity that they were found to have excelled in. He equated them with their great liberality, which he called "the grace of God bestowed on the churches."

In verse one, some Bible commentators think that the word should have been rendered the 'gift' of God given in, or by, the churches. This is true as well. That is, either *the grace of God* or *the gift of God*. Paul is talking about the charitable gifts of these churches, which are called either the "gifts" or the "grace" of God—either because they were very large, or because their charity to the poor saints proceeded from God (as the Author of those gifts). As they were accompanied by true love for God, it was also manifested in that way. That is, in that enormous giving.

The grace of God must be the root of all the good that is in us, or done by us; and it is bestowed on us. To make us useful to others, God's grace is forwarded to others in the good work that we do. So it is already a relationship with God. It is already *a betrothed relationship with God*. God gives us the gifts, and then we forward them on to others.

In verse two, Paul commended the charity of the Macedonians. He knew that they were distressed themselves and in deep poverty, and yet they contributed to the relief of others. It was a time of great affliction for them, as described in Acts 18:17, where it describes to those individuals in Macedonia.

Acts 18:17 Then all the Greeks took Sosthenes, the ruler of the synagogue, and beat him before the judgment seat. But Gallio [who was the leader in that area] took no notice of these things.

So those Macedonians, who were doing so much for others (by giving, by putting together an enormous number of abundance to send to those other areas), were themselves under persecution. They were losing their jobs because of keeping their beliefs and their faithfulness to God. And yet they were able to pull themselves up by the bootstraps and really send an enormous, abundant offering of food and needed clothing to Acacia.

The Christians in these parts were enduring terrible persecution, which had reduced them to poverty. Yet they had an abundance of joy in the midst of tribulation. They thrived in their liberality. And that is what Paul is talking about here in II Corinthians 8. They gave of what they had (which was little), and they trusted in God to provide for them. (In this affluent society in which we live, that is so very tough to do—because we so easily get wrapped up in the material goods.)

Not only did they give of their poverty, but also they gave a lot. That is, as liberally as if they had been rich. It was a large contribution that they made; and, all things considered, it was according to and *beyond* their actual power. They gave "until it hurt."

This is the type of loving sacrifice that makes a marriage successful. This is what we must allow God to develop in us, as we grow in our betrothed relationship with Christ. In any successful marriage, both spouses must—at times—go *beyond* their normal power, to serve one another.

The Macedonians were very ready and anxious to do this good work. They chose to sacrifice. They had given so much that they have to urge and persuade Paul to take their great sacrifice to the Acacians. He was very reluctant to take it. It seems that Paul was reluctant, not only because of their great sacrifice, but also because it was such a large amount. He was concerned that his enemies would try to accuse him of misusing the goods for his own benefit. He thought his enemies might accuse him of indiscretion and partiality in the distribution of it. So he was very concerned that he would go on and have to take it to them. He wanted to, in that he wanted to help very badly. But he knew of the attacks that he had constantly gotten, and wondered if it was the best thing for him to be the one to actually take it.

The charity of the Macedonians was performed in the right way. First, they *submitted* and *humbled* themselves before God. Then they gave their contributions by the will of God. That is, according to His will and then for His glory. They were not giving it for their own glory, but for the glory of God and for His church. This, it seems, was more than Paul had expected or even hoped for.

Some of the lessons that we can learn from the Macedonians that are applicable in marriage are these (and they are applicable to any marriage). First, we sanctify our contributions to God's honor by first submitting ourselves to Him. The second one is that, by giving ourselves to God's use, there is no better use for us. Thirdly, when we give ourselves to God, we then give Him all we have—to be called for, and disposed of, according to His will. The fourth one is that whatever we use or lay out for God, it is only giving to Him what He has already given to us. And the fifth lesson is that what we give will not be accepted by God, or credited to our advantage, unless we first submit and humble ourselves to Him.

Notice the key words in all five of those points. There were *submitting*, and *giving*, and *humbling ourselves*. That is the same thing that we have to do in a marriage. These lessons (from II Corinthians 8:1-5) are what make our courting relationship with God work. These are foundational conditions for a successful marriage with Jesus Christ,

Choosing to Have a Good Relationship by Martin G. Collins (<http://www.cgg.org>)

with our physical mate, and our brethren as well. *Submit, give, and humble ourselves.* Those are the three keys to having a successful marriage. (Of course, they are not the only "keys," but they are the main keys.) So that first point is that we choose to be committed to our spouse for better or for worse. We make the choice!

The second one is that *we choose to speak or not to speak.* Good communication is a necessity, and a rarity, in most marriages. Couples need to reserve time in their day to really talk and listen to each other. Until the habit is formed, it will not happen naturally. Communication skills must be desired, and we must *choose* to develop them with our mate. We must *choose* to develop our communication skills with each other as brethren. And we must *choose* to develop our communication skills with God, in prayer.

Not only must we communicate, but also it must be in a positive and uplifting way. It should be gentle and kind, without harsh words. Communicating with our spouse, or with the brethren, must be to get to get to know the other intimately—including their desires and interests.

Each day I get an e-mail that appears on my computer screen, which is called "the tip of the day." It is just very short, but it is always good advice that comes across on this tip of the day. I receive it from the Real Age Web Site. The one from yesterday was entitled "Snuggle Up." It said, "Exercise isn't the only way to stay young. Keeping close with your special someone may provide some of the same benefits. Research has shown that long-lasting loving relationships provide long-lasting health benefits. In fact, studies have revealed that a successful marriage has a higher correlation with arterial youth than does low cholesterol. One way to improve your relationship this winter is to snuggle up after work, and talk."

The Real Age always gives a benefit to it, in terms of years (of longevity or youth). They said that the long-term loving relationships could make your "real age" as much as 6.5 years younger. So it has a great effect on us.

The church communicates with its future Husband through prayer—drawing it closer.

Philippians 4:6-7 Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

Remember that I said earlier that it takes peace in order for the fruit of the Spirit to grow

Choosing to Have a Good Relationship by Martin G. Collins (<http://www.cgg.org>)

in a marriage. The betrothed church's relationship with Christ depends on and relies on the intimacy of our individual communication with the present Family of God. So that second point was that we choose to speak or not to speak.

The third point the author brought out was *we choose to make our house a home*. The benefits of a loving home, a haven from the pressures of the world, and a place of comfort is what most families are looking for. When one person is overly-burdened with a task, there is a lack of joy for the whole family. Couples need to figure out ways to partner in the cares and daily routines of the home. When all the members of a family share in the care of the home, there is a spirit of togetherness as well as a more smoothly run home. So everyone has to work together to make the house a home. And it is something that we have to *choose* to do. It does not come automatically.

The church is a safe haven from the cares of this world. To run smoothly, it requires that everyone pitch in to care for one another and to do the work.

John 14:1-3 "Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me [Jesus Christ]. In My Father's house are many mansions [or offices, or rooms]; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also.

Jesus Christ is already preparing His Father's house to be a home—a home for *us* as the future Bride of Christ.

To have a home, we have to be there often. If we are hardly ever there, it is not our home. We have all heard the saying *home is where the heart is*. So how can our "heart" be at home if we are never there? Spiritually, our hearts must be with God; but physically our hearts must be with our mates and our brethren.

So Sabbath services each week is our "home" as well. How can we make the church our "home" if we are not at Sabbath services every week? There are reasons for missing—there is sickness and other things that come up. But it is a rare thing for us to have a good reason not to be at services. 'Relatives coming over' is *not* a reason to skip out on God. Our car breaking down sometimes is, but we still should make our best efforts to get here. (Call the brethren. Call someone to come and get you.) It is important to be here! We cannot make the church our "home" if we are not here.

The fourth point that the author brought out was that *we choose to marry the whole*

Choosing to Have a Good Relationship by Martin G. Collins (<http://www.cgg.org>)

family. For many people, this is very difficult. I am very thankful because I do not have a hard time of that, and I feel very blessed. (I am speaking of my physical family.) Like it or not, when you marry, you also marry your spouse's family. Realize that many of the qualities that you love in your spouse come from the parents, and that for twenty years or so, before you came on the scene, your in-laws had the greatest influence on your spouse. Yes, the Bible is clear about leaving your parents when you marry; but you should seek to have a peaceful loving relationship with your parents, and in-laws, as well. They are family too.

Ephesians 4:1-6 I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called, with all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love, endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace [There is that "peace" again.]. There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all who is above all, and through all, and in your all.

When we are married, we become *one*, and that is part of the lesson that we are learning in our marriages here on earth. We have a responsibility of bearing patiently with the idiosyncrasies, the faults, and sicknesses of others. This verse requires a humble spirit and a good attitude when we feel provoked by others. It seems that no virtue is more frequently demanded in our contact with others.

Many people have a temperament different from our own. There are many different personalities. They may be optimistic, or pessimistic, or sad—while we may be just the reverse. They may have peculiarities of taste, habits, and disposition—which differ from ours. They have their own plans and purposes of life, and their own way and time of doing things. They may be naturally irritable. Or it may be because they do not feel well, or because they are sick. Or they have learned different dialects of different languages. The differences are infinite.

These distinctions are not limited to racial or ethnic differences. Neighbors have noted these things in neighbors, friends in their friends, relatives in their relatives, one church member in another. So it crosses all lines. A husband and a wife can find enough idiosyncrasies in each other to embitter life, if they are looking for it. That is why it is best to ignore it. *If* they choose to magnify "imperfections" and to become irritated by trifles, *then* it is possible for any friendship (no matter how close) to be marred in this way—if we allow it.

Choosing to Have a Good Relationship by Martin G. Collins (<http://www.cgg.org>)

We are always making choices. We make choices to have a good marriage, or we make a choice to have a bad one. If we do not make a choice to have a good marriage, then we have already—by default—made the choice to have a bad marriage. So it takes effort.

In order for life to move on peacefully, we have to learn to "bear and forbear." We have to generally "indulge" the friend that we love—in the little oddities of speech and action that may be important to him, but that may be of little interest to us. So the point there is that we choose to marry the whole family. And the whole family has many, many idiosyncrasies; and many different likes and dislikes; and many different ways of approaching things.

The fifth point that the author makes is that *we choose to live in love*. The love that we felt during the courtship days may change in style, but it does not have to change in substance. Loving another person is a decision not based on circumstances but on relationship. A loving outlook on life can shape all of our dealings for the better.

I Corinthians 13:1-3 Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not love, I have become sounding brass or a clanging cymbal. And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not love, it profits me nothing.

Now, verses four through eight shows us the fruit of love.

I Corinthians 13:4-8 Love suffers long and is kind; love does not envy; love does not parade itself, is not puffed up; does not behave rudely, does not seek its own, is not provoked, thinks no evil; does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth; bears all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never fails.

Everything there is positive, and that is the way our relationship in marriage should be. These five scriptures are so important in a successful marriage that they are used in our marriage ceremonies in the Church of the Great God. (I am pretty sure that they were in Worldwide Church of God as well.)

Choosing to Have a Good Relationship by Martin G. Collins (<http://www.cgg.org>)

If you want to improve your marriage geometrically, use this passage as a checklist on how to treat your spouse. There is a dire result to ignoring this. But, again, we choose to live this way, or we choose to have a good marriage. We *choose* to live in love.

It may be that Christ will not want us as His Bride if we do not produce this list of fruit that is produced from godly love—*agape* love. If we cannot properly love our physical spouse, and we cannot properly love our brethren, then why in the universe would Christ want to marry us (as a church, or as a body, or individuals)?

Well, He will make us ready. So—although we have made many mistakes in our marriages and our lives—by submitting to God, obeying Him, and humbling ourselves He will help us to overcome the problems that we have. He will get us there as a chaste and pure virgin.

Is it important for those of us who observe other marriages, who have been married, or who are married to apply ourselves in the spirit of I Corinthians 13 in our relationships with our brethren? If it is important to God that we produce the fruit of love in our physical marriage, how much more important is it in our spiritual preparation as the future Bride of Christ! So we choose to live in love, which is the fifth point.

The sixth and final point is that *we choose to stay until death do us part*. Divorce is not God-ordained. Wanting "out" of a marriage needs to be seen as an ominous warning to make changes fast in our marriage—not as the beginning of a separation or divorce. Instead of thinking about getting out, determine what must be put into a marriage to make it last. Do not overlook the support of friends to help you and your spouse recommit to your marriage relationship.

That goes for the church as well. Not only should we seek help (from our friends and from the ministry), if we are having marriage problems; but if we are having problems with our preparation for our marriage to Jesus Christ, then we should seek help from our brethren and the ministry as well.

In a British national opinion poll on marriage and family, commissioned by CARE and based on two surveys (in November 1994 and November 1996), it revealed some interesting facts. Almost half of married people are so content with their relationship that there is nothing they want to change about it. Most people say *friendship, commitment, and trust* are the best things about their marriage. And, one other thing, women most prize their husbands for such attributes as being *caring, thoughtful, and faithful* while men prefer *domestication, communication, and intelligence*. We will see what Paul says about this, back in Romans 7.

Choosing to Have a Good Relationship by Martin G. Collins (<http://www.cgg.org>)

Romans 7:2-4 For the woman who has a husband is bound by the law to her husband as long as he lives. But if the husband dies, she is released from the law of her husband. So then if, while her husband lives, she marries another man, she will be called an adulteress; but if her husband dies, she is free from that law, so that she is no adulteress, though she has married another man. Therefore, my brethren, you also have become dead to the law through the body of Christ, that you may be married to another—to Him who was raised from the dead, that we should bear fruit to God.

In a sense, we were married to sin when we were in the world; but we are no longer married to sin. We are in the process to being married to God.

Romans 7:5-6 For when we were in the flesh, the sinful passions which were aroused by the law were at work in our members to bear fruit to death. But now we have been delivered from the law, having died to what we were held by, so that we should serve in the newness of the Spirit and not in the oldness of the letter.

Jesus rose from the dead. He is alive, and He is divine (as we will be). He has been glorified. His eyes are flames of fire, His face bright as the sun. And that is what we may inherit. But we have to have our previous marriage to sin ended, and that is only through death. If we repent, believe with living faith, and accept Jesus Christ as personal Savior and betrothed Husband, we can receive God's gift of the Holy Spirit. That gift imparts to us the very life, essence, nature, mind, and power of God. This is the way that we will be brought to a point where we will be a pure and chaste virgin for our marriage to Jesus Christ. If we grow spiritually (as II Peter 3:18 admonishes us), overcome, and endure—we will be changed from mortal to spirit at Christ's coming.

I Corinthians 15:44-46 It is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body. There is a natural body, and there is a spiritual body. And so it is written, "The first man Adam became a living being." The last Adam [Jesus Christ] became a life-giving spirit. However, the spiritual is not first, but the natural, and afterward the spiritual.

We will die and be raised into the Kingdom of God for eternity. We *choose* to stay until death do us part. We *choose* to stay in God's church until death do us part. We *choose* to stay with our mates until death do us part. We *choose* to make the decision.

Though marriage is a physical union, it is a divine institution. God does nothing without a reason and a definite purpose. Those who are called now and repent, and receive Christ as Savior, follow God's Spirit, overcome, and are chosen will not only be **in** the marriage to Christ but will rule with Him. They will be priests, as well as kings. With the saints made immortal as the collective wife of Christ, the human mortals left alive on earth will be ruled by Christ and by those saints (whom we hope to be)—those firstfruits. The human mortals will be taught and ruled by immortals.

And those who do, then, repent and come to salvation through Christ will then receive God's gift of His Holy Spirit. Then they will inherit the Kingdom of God.

Matthew 25:31-40 "When the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then He will sit on the throne of His glory. All the nations will be gathered before Him, and He will separate them one from another, as a shepherd divides his sheep from the goats. And He will set the sheep on His right hand, but the goats on the left. Then the King will say to those on His right hand, 'Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave Me food; I was thirsty and you have Me drink; I was a stranger and you took Me in; I was naked and you clothed Me; I was sick and you visited Me; I was in prison and you came to Me.' Then the righteous will answer Him, saying, 'Lord, when did we see You hungry and feed You, or thirsty and give You drink? When did we see You a stranger and take You in, or naked and clothe You? Or when did we see You sick, or in prison, and come to You? And the King will answer and say to them, 'Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me.'

Let me ask you a question: If we do not have this *servicing attitude* in our marriages and in our relationship with each other as brethren, can we expect that Jesus Christ will want to marry *us* as part of the body of the Bride of Christ? Hebrews 2:9 informs us that the living Christ is already crowned with glory and honor. He is the firstborn of many brethren—meaning, we who have His Spirit. And Jesus Christ is the captain of our salvation. He is the pioneer who has gone ahead, leading the way—as the Husband, preparing the dwelling place for His wife.

We, collectively, in the near future will have the incredible opportunity to be the Bride of Christ, His wife—ruling with Him in an intimate Family relationship for eternity. It is a

Choosing to Have a Good Relationship by Martin G. Collins (<http://www.cgg.org>)

Family of love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control—all qualities of a great marriage and family. We **choose** to have a good marriage. So let us make our choice the right one—and not just, by default, have another choice made for us.