

Dating (Part 2): The Proper Order Of Things

Time, Cultivation, Restraint and Hope

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Children perceive things in a more simple form than adults do. Elementary school-aged children were asked about whether it is better to be single or married. Will, a seven year old, offered this reply: "It gives me a headache to think about that stuff. I am just a kid. I do not need that kind of trouble."

Often eligible singles have the same attitude about how much trouble dating and marriage can be. I get the feeling that some singles think dating and marriage is just too much work. I know that many of you singles are constantly frustrated by the whole ordeal. And, yes, I agree with you, it is a lot of work.

Many singles in the church have sought friendship, companionship, romance and mates in the world. Knowing human nature, it is only natural that the abundance of singles in the world would be a tremendous pull. All of us feel the tugging of the world beckoning us to come and partake of its "thrills," which quite often end up as "chills."

For singles who attend God's church, the overwhelming pull from the world is other singles. In the case of worldly singles, there is the very powerful desire for a sexual encounter. This is what can be expected when dating the average worldly single.

And, although this is a factor with some singles who attend God's church, I have found that most often what drives the singles is a desire for companionship to offset their loneliness. They are looking for someone whose looks and personality are attractive; someone to spend time with, to do things with, to have fun with, to laugh with, to talk with, or to just hang out with.

Sadly, in their pursuit of someone of like-mind, they foolishly turn to the world, turning their backs on those who are truly like-minded. But, even some singles in the church are not of like-mind if they have not developed a healthy relationship with God. This is seen in the lack of overcoming sin in their own lives. Even the self-righteousness of some singles is a real 'turn-off' to others. So there are obstacles, both to dating in the world, and to dating in the church. The obstacles and the penalties are far worse in the world than dating in the church.

Even still, dating outside of the church is like playing a Polish style of Russian roulette. Russian roulette is a gambling game in which players bet on which chamber of a

Dating (Part 2): The Proper Order of Things by Martin G. Collins (<http://www.cgg.org>)

revolver contains the bullet. When dating and marrying someone in the world, instead of click, click, click, click—bang; it is bang, bang, bang, bang—click. The click means you have successfully avoided the deadly bullet of the wrong person to marry.

So, what is a single person in God's church to do?

First, let us look at the biblical principle of the proper order of wisdom. That probably means very little to you singles at this point. Let us begin to build this principle as it is extremely important in a Christian's development.

The patterns and boundaries that reflect both the physical and moral order of the universe, while always present and integral to the creation, are not always easily discerned, nor is their effectiveness immediately understood.

Nonetheless, God gave to men and women, as His image bearers, a commission to gain insight into this order and make explicit use of it by bringing the earth into subjection and by being good stewards of the garden into which they were placed. The responsibility to do so continues in the form of the biblical obligation to pursue wisdom.

Part of wisdom is to be able to understand the order with which God created the world, to distinguish things that differ and to discern the appropriate and inappropriate times for everything under heaven..

Ecclesiastes 3:1-8 To everything there is a season, a time for every purpose under heaven: a time to be born, and a time to die; a time to plant, and a time to pluck up what is planted; a time to kill, and a time to heal; a time to break down, and a time to build up; a time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance; a time to cast away stones, and a time to gather stones; a time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing; a time to gain, and a time to lose; a time to keep, and a time to throw away; a time to tear, and a time to sew; a time to keep silence, and a time to speak; a time to love, and a time to hate; a time of war, and a time of peace.

Those who refuse to pursue wisdom and prefer instead to live disorderly lives are labeled fools and sluggards in the book of Proverbs. Orderliness is crucial for humanity's civil duty and the cultural task of dating and marriage, and it is even more important for God's work in us.

Dating (Part 2): The Proper Order of Things by Martin G. Collins (<http://www.cgg.org>)

If God and His Word bring order, then sin disrupts it. God's solution is to assert order, by distinguishing between things that differ—as He does between the church and the world.

To the church the apostle writes, "For God is not the author of confusion but of peace, as in all the churches of the saints" (I Corinthians 14:33).

Ultimately, the fact that God is a God of order and not of confusion extends beyond the physical realm into relationships within the church. It includes God giving authority to church leaders to be certain that all activities within the household of God are conducted "decently and in order." Paul states this in I Corinthians 14:40, "Let all things be done decently and in order." In doing things decently and in order, as wise Solomon said, there is "a time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing." Of course, that can relate directly to dating.

Here is a very telling definition of the dating term "irritating habit": an irritating habit is "what the endearing little qualities that initially attract two people to each other turn into after a few months together".

Do not marry impulsively! I can think of no better way to mess up your life than to leap into this critical decision without careful decision, without careful thought and prayer. Remember, the average dating relationship is designed to conceal information, not reveal it. Both partners put on their very best faces for the one they seek to attract. They guard secrets that might be a "turn-off." Therefore, many newly-weds get a big surprise during the first year of married life. I strongly suggest that you take at least a year to get beyond the façade and into the inner character of the person.

In Dr. Laura Schlessinger's New York bestseller, *10 Stupid Things Women Do To Mess Up Their Lives*, one of the ten things is: "stupid courtship". I recommend that all of you single women read this book. There is also a complementary issue to this, which is, *Ten Stupid Things Men Do To Mess Up Their Lives*. She recommends you get to know a person for one and a half years before you even contemplate engagement. It takes that long to get a clear picture of the other person. Keep in mind that Dr. Laura has been on the radio for years and years talking to people who have had difficulties in their marriages, and so she speaks with a great deal of experience and authority in this area.

There are three things needed in a dating relationship: time, cultivation and restraint. If the person you are dating is pressing you morally, it is because he does not fear God and respect His standard of righteousness—His standard of decency.

Dating (Part 2): The Proper Order of Things by Martin G. Collins (<http://www.cgg.org>)

If he (this is a he/she situation) will not obey God when he is dating you, what makes you think that when you are married and he must fulfill the commandment of God to love, that he will love you as Christ loves the church? If he will not obey God when he is single, he will break your heart as a man who is married. His obedience as a single is a harbinger of what is to come. The same holds true for unbelieving women.

Let me illustrate this "in-due-time" principle with a very familiar spiritual analogy. In human physical reproduction, there is a time element. From impregnation—begetting on the part of the father, and having conceived on the part of the mother—to birth is a time element of about nine months. That nine month time period is called gestation. Upon conception, the now fertilized ovum is called an embryo. A few months later, it is called a fetus. God does everything in order and decently.

In looking at this analogy as a spiritual reality, what actually happens is that when we, after repentance, faith, and baptism receive the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of God puts us into—baptizes us into—God's church. The church is called the body of Christ.

The human mother of the fetus within her womb serves the function of feeding her unborn child with physical food, so that it may develop and grow physically, and also she carries it where she may best protect it from physical injury or harm, until delivery from her womb.

The church is commissioned to "feed the flock" through the ministry which God has set in the church for the perfecting of the saints and for the edifying of the body of Christ. Perfection of holy righteous character must be developed (with God's help and the indwelling of His Spirit) during this human life. Not only is the church to feed the members on the Word of God—spiritual food—but also she is to protect these children of God from spiritual harm.

The apostle Paul warns us that there are those in the world who want to harm us not just physically but spiritually as well. He cautions us not to be immature children about these worldly individuals who seek to deceive us. The same insightful advice can be applied to dating people in the world.

Ephesians 4:14 that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting,

We know there are many singles in the world who date exactly this way. We see here a

Dating (Part 2): The Proper Order of Things by Martin G. Collins (<http://www.cgg.org>)

very strong problem with dating in the world, one of many.

To make right and wise spiritual decisions we must be led by God's Spirit. Yet at this time, we are in the gestation state, not yet delivered.

Romans 8:19-22 For the earnest expectation of the creation eagerly waits for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it in hope; because the creation itself also will be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation groans and labors with birth pangs together until now.

We in God's church groan for our marriage to Jesus Christ, but we have to go through the proper order of things—the proper process which takes time. As human beings, we are naturally impatient. But, the best things are worth waiting for. The dating time, then, the engagement period, followed by the marriage, takes time.

It must be done according to God's will and according to His time frame—not one that we impatiently force. If we move too fast we cause ourselves no end of problems. So, we have to resist the influence of a society that demands everything now, if not yesterday.

The point is that it takes time to develop a close enough relationship to be ready for marriage. Sometimes this time process is artificially sped up by a premarital pregnancy, which has a negative impact on the marriage relationship far into the future. Often, the detrimental effect is in the form of resentment at having to prematurely make such an important long-term commitment when one or the other is not ready for marriage yet.

Frequently, the detrimental effect is in the form of doubt—doubt as to whether the other person would have married you had he (or she) not been forced into it. Even the wedding day itself is tainted.

There is also the poor example it sets for others in the church. This type of example has the tendency to cause other singles to say, "Well, they did it and God has blessed them." But things are not always what they seem.

Proverbs 14:12 There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death.

Dating (Part 2): The Proper Order of Things by Martin G. Collins (<http://www.cgg.org>)

I speak from experience and observation over a period of forty years in the church, that this has happened repeatedly and repeatedly and over, again.

Martin, a ten year old, had this to say about what he thought people do on their first date: "On the first date, they just tell each other lies, and that usually gets them interested enough to go on a second date".

Sadly, this is more true than anyone would like to admit. It takes time to cultivate a good relationship. We live in a society where people want it now and they are willing to lie to get it! This attitude affects the way courtship is handled. Singles commonly make the mistake of moving too fast in a relationship. There needs to be **time** to discern things about the other person.

Having been at Ambassador College for a total of four years, many students thought that they were perfectly matched with each other. It was because their schedules were identical. When they left college, and they got married, they realized that they did not have anything in common. In that case, even four years was not enough for those marriages, sadly.

Popular, attractive, exciting people, may seem perfect to you when you are first attracted to the other person, but do not move too fast. Wait a while, maybe even a couple of years, before you consider him (or her) for marriage. It is often the case, especially with teenagers, that their immature emotions or poor morals get them into big trouble.

How many premarital pregnancies, abortions, sexually transmitted diseases, dysfunctional marriages, miserable divorces, or ongoing immoral co-habitations, do we see time and time again in society? And, sadly, some of these things exist among professing Christians.

So, what is a single in God's church to do, with regard to dating people in the world? I will let you think on that. (I have been thinking for years about this question. I am ready to speak about it.) The proper order of things applies in all circumstances—both to singles who are attending God's church, or who are in the world. The proper order of developing a friendship, possibly followed by dating, possibly followed by marriage is found in three steps:

1. Keep the acquaintance that turns into a friendship in a non-romantic stance.
2. As the acquaintance develops into a non-romantic friendship, work to discern his (or her) attitude toward God and His truth. See if you have common moral

Dating (Part 2): The Proper Order of Things by Martin G. Collins (<http://www.cgg.org>)

values. Remember, this takes time—months, maybe even years. Find out what he or she believes.

Is he interested in the truth? Is he receptive to the hope that is in you? Does he find biblical truth deeply revealing as you tell him what you believe?

[Caution: **Beware of those who understand God's truth intellectually without any real desire to commit**]. Many in Ambassador College found this out the hard way. They had been dating for three or four years and thought that they were marrying someone who was in God's church. Then they found out that the person only understood it intellectually, and did not have any commitment.

If there is no real interest in God's truth, do not let the friendship go beyond a general non-romantic stance. God is probably not calling him at that moment; maybe God will call him later or maybe He will not. Either way he is not a good candidate for ongoing dating or romance, and especially not marriage.

It is at this point that most singles go astray on the development of the relationship. They move quickly from acquaintance to romantic friendship with little or no discussion of the most important factor in life—determining his or her system of beliefs. There are only two main systems of beliefs—the truth and the lie!

I John 4:6 We are of God. He who knows God hears us; he who is not of God does not hear us. By this, we know the spirit of truth and the spirit of error.

3. Once you have discerned that God is calling him (that is, you can see repentance and changes of his past ways and his interest and knowledge of God's way of life is increasing), then, you can begin to think about letting your non-romantic friendship develop into a romantic friendship, and date regularly. That is the proper order of things. I would say that probably most of the singles in God's church who go to the world to solve their solution do it the wrong way. They leap right from acquaintance to romantic friendship.

Time is of the essence when it comes to developing a relationship. Give it time. Let time pass. You will find that eventually a person's true colors will come out. You may not like the colors that you see—and I am not talking about race. Or, hopefully, time will confirm

Dating (Part 2): The Proper Order of Things by Martin G. Collins (<http://www.cgg.org>)

you have made the right decision.

Does the other person have a good reputation? I have heard numerous divorced people say that they would not have married their previous spouse if they had taken the time to get to know him (or her) better. They have added that they felt that they needed more than a year to do that.

Boaz said something to Ruth that will shed some light on this issue.

Ruth 2:11 And Boaz answered and said to her [Ruth], "It has been fully reported to me, all that you have done for your mother-in-law since the death of your husband, and how you have left your father and your mother and the land of your birth, and have come to a people whom you did not know before."

The highlight there is *'fully reported and all that you done'*. Boaz had no doubt about her reputation. Ruth's character was revealed in the way that she served others and in the way that she put her trust in the God of Israel by aligning with His people. This was remarkable enough for Boaz to hear about and recall to her when they first met.

You can make the same observations today by watching how someone serves others. This is best done in the context of friendship because once the possibility of romance rears its head, it is hard to remain objective.

When your emotions become entangled, there is more at stake when you see red flags and it becomes a greater temptation to dismiss the concerns. You want to know what someone's track record is before you both are tempted to do things simply for the sake of pleasing the other or earning his (or her) approval. Time invested in a period of friendship without romance is important in cultivating discernment.

One of the biggest impediments to discernment is a form of dating narcissism. This is that giddy time early in a relationship when you do not really know very much about the other person, but there is the tantalizing possibility of someone else finding you irresistibly attractive. The wine of compliments and smooth talking often intoxicates singles.

BEWARE! Sexual predators use this technique to get what they want. Their neighbors describe often serial killers as "such a nice person." "A person of character" is often part of the description.

Dating (Part 2): The Proper Order of Things by Martin G. Collins (<http://www.cgg.org>)

Dating narcissism is the self-love that readily agrees with someone else's high opinion of you! You are an incredible gift to the opposite sex, so in your mind, it is a good thing someone else has finally seen this and is willing to treat you like the special one that you are. Unfortunately, this high opinion of yourself often clouds your judgment of another's true behavior and character.

That rush of pent-up emotion in the beginning of a relationship when you get "a date—at last!" is a powerful surge. It can carry you a long way before you start to soberly notice the foundational issues of character in the other person's life.

The question is: what is the reputation of the individual in whom you are interested?

You single men would be wise to consider the feminine qualities listed in Proverbs 31, Titus 2 and I Peter 3 when you are interested in a woman. These are specific virtues that godly women are to cultivate over the course of their lives, virtues that last far longer than outward appearance.

You single women would be wise to consider the leadership and benevolent qualities of godly men listed in I Timothy 3:1-10 and Isaiah 32:1-8.

No one will ever be perfect in the physical life we live. So, do not look for perfection, because you will not find it anywhere on earth. Look for someone whose trajectory—whose planned route—is in the direction of the Kingdom of God. God wants husbands and wives to spur one another on as they overcome their shortcomings and sins to be changed to the measure and stature of Jesus Christ.

Joseph, the son of Jacob, was a man of moral integrity. Joseph's example of restraint while Potiphar's wife deceptively tried to seduce him is a virtuous example of how every Christian should handle such a seductive assault, whether you are a man or a woman.

You know the story well. Joseph ended up in Egypt after his brothers had sold him as a slave. Potiphar, Pharaoh's wealthy captain of the guard, bought Joseph (but not to worry for God was with him.) With God's help, Joseph was so successful at his job that Potiphar placed him in authority over all his possessions. Potiphar's wife had a lustful eye for the handsome and well-built Joseph.

Genesis 39:7-18 And it came to pass after these things that his master's wife cast longing eyes on Joseph, and she said, "Lie with me." But he refused and said to his master's wife, "Look, my master does not know what is with me in the house, and he has committed all that he has to my hand."

Dating (Part 2): The Proper Order of Things by Martin G. Collins (<http://www.cgg.org>)

There is no one greater in this house than I, nor has he kept back anything from me but you, because you are his wife. How then can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?" [There we see that sexual sins, especially adultery, are sins against God, against the person committing them, against the person being committed against, and everyone in society.] So it was, as she spoke to Joseph day by day, [trying to wear him down] that he did not heed her, to lie with her or to be with her. But it happened about this time, when Joseph went into the house to do his work, and none of the men of the house was inside, that she caught him by his garment, saying, "Lie with me." But he left his garment in her hand, and fled and ran outside. And so it was, when she saw that he had left his garment in her hand and fled outside, that she called to the men of her house and spoke to them, saying, "See, he has brought in to us a Hebrew to mock us. He came in to me to lie with me, and I cried out with a loud voice. "And it happened, when he heard that I lifted my voice and cried out, that he left his garment with me, and fled and went outside." So she kept his garment with her until his master came home. Then she spoke to him with words like these, saying, "The Hebrew servant whom you brought to us came in to me to mock me; "so it happened, as I lifted my voice and cried out, that he left his garment with me and fled outside."

When Potiphar heard the accusation of his wife, he sent Joseph to the king's prison. And, God was with Joseph, as He always was, and showed mercy to him and gave him favor with the keeper of the prison, who put Joseph over all the other prisoners. As before, God made everything Joseph did prosper. Eventually, Joseph was made second to Pharaoh over Egypt. All this that God did for him happened because Joseph was a faithful, virtuous man of integrity, and he held to God's standards. God carried him through everything. You singles can rely on God in the same way, if you do the right thing, and you obey God, that He will provide the right mate at the right time.

A major problem with many singles is that they have not regularly studied their Bible so that God can talk to them about how to choose wisely.

For example, it seems, all too often singles ignore God's clear instruction about intimate relationships with people outside God's church. God commands, through the apostle Paul in II Corinthians 6:14, "Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers."

Let us look briefly at three arguments that singles in the church present to justify looking to the world:

Argument 1: There is no one. They argue: "But there is no one in the church to date, much less marry." This is probably the most common complaint I have heard from singles. How many times have you singles looked around your local areas in despair? Often there is not someone to date in your area, let alone marry. So, some start making the mistake of dating outside the church. They reason that "there are many decent, honest people in the world, and if I can get that person to love me, God will convert him." In this way, they presumptuously try to force God to do what they want, rather than God's will being done.

Singles sometimes pray fervently asking God to provide a husband or wife for them. Then, they become attracted to someone in the world and falsely reason that God sent them someone from the world. Regrettably, it rarely works that way.

On the lighter side, this illustration will serve to demonstrate the attitude of some singles when praying:

Paddy was driving down the street in a sweat because he had an important meeting and could not find a parking place. Looking up to heaven he said, "Lord take pity on me. If you find me a parking place I will go to Mass every Sunday for the rest of me life and give up me Irish whiskey." Miraculously, a parking place appeared. Paddy looked up again and said, "Never mind, I found one."

We can relate this directly to the attitude some have toward God when it comes to finding a mate. It is very dangerous to create your own worldly solutions to your loneliness. God has someone in mind for you and He wants you to have faith in Him that He will provide the right person at the right time. He wants you to diligently improve yourself to prepare for marriage.

Spending hours in despair complaining there is no one to marry is fruitless. Make as many non-romantic friends in the church as possible. You will have many acquaintances at work, but keep them non-romantic as I said in the three points.

Argument 2: Unusual Times. Singles sometimes justify dating outside the church by reasoning, "These are unusual times. If the church were not so small, I would not need to look outside." If you would study church history, you would find that these are not unusual times; these are very usual times for the church. The church has always been small. I think the only time in history that the church in general was as large as 140,000 was when Worldwide was at its largest. People have always been scattered, and always

Dating (Part 2): The Proper Order of Things by Martin G. Collins (<http://www.cgg.org>)

had to deal with this "dating problem". God is the Sovereign Power of the Universe and beyond; He can most certainly provide you with a mate. It gets back to the first sermon that I gave on dating, on faith. How faithful are you?

Satan knows the seeming dilemma of your loneliness, and he will take every opportunity to exploit that. He knows exactly to whom you would be attracted and he knows exactly how to entice you out of the church. For singles, one of the most effective ways is for Satan to provide you with somebody in the world. Now God can provide you with somebody from the world, but only if you follow those three steps in the proper order. Putting God's way first, not your own, requires a great amount of faith, and moral and spiritual strength. Remember, there is a judgment for what we do.

II Corinthians 5:10 For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad.

II Corinthians 5:15 and He died for all, that those who live should live no longer for themselves, but for Him who died for them and rose again.

Singles that date and marry outside the church live selfishly for themselves. You cannot assume or try to force God to call an unbelieving friend. We cannot force God to do anything. God is under no obligation to call your date or your mate, especially if you deliberately choose to date and marry outside of the church. Sometimes God does call unconverted mates, but it is not the norm. There are many members who have attended for years, even decades, whose spouses have not responded to a calling by God, or were never called at all.

If you think God is calling the person you are interested in, do not rush into anything. Wait at least a year or two to test the fruits. You probably would not date an alcoholic just because he had joined Alcoholics Anonymous. You would wait and see if he stuck with it.

Argument 3: I am Getting Old. "If I do not get married soon, I will miss out." Miss out on what, this life or the next?

Romans 8:18 For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.

Dating (Part 2): The Proper Order of Things by Martin G. Collins (<http://www.cgg.org>)

God cares for you singles. He will not test you beyond what you can handle. You are not the first person to be single, and you will not be the last.

Marriage is a desirable thing, but it is not to be desired more than what it foreshadows—the intimate relationship we will have when the church marries Christ. Physical marriage is not a prerequisite for life or for the Kingdom. It may be hard to believe, but in the long run, it will not matter that you did not marry right now if that is God's will for you. But, we know that it is God's will for the majority of people to be married. This physical life is only temporary, and very short, compared to eternity. But, temporary does not always seem short to the human mind. Imagine making the wrong choice about a mate. Try to comprehend the rest of your life with double hardships, sorrow, grief and unhappiness, all because you relied on yourself instead of trusting in God.

Marriage may be your goal, but it might not be what God wants for you—or maybe the time is not right for the person God has in mind for you. Pray that God's will be done in your life and only good will come of it.

Who better than God to help you through the lonely times, and lead you to the right person at the right time? As I said in Part 1 of this Dating series: Do you really believe God? Do you really have faith?

Reality often sets in when your friend or spouse resents your religion. They see how it consumes you in Bible Study, in prayer, in Sabbath activities and tithing, which is often the biggest issue of all. These may not seem like a big deal now, but they will when your spouse asks what and who comes first in your life, and possibly asks you to choose between him (or her) and the church.

Trying to keep worldly practices out of your home becomes an all-consuming balancing act. After all, it is your unconverted spouse's home, too! Try juggling God's festivals and your mate's practices of Christmas, New Year's, Easter, Halloween, Valentine's Day and so on. Then there are the day-to-day issues: unclean toppings on your pizza; the lobster at your anniversary dinner; and the quality of your television viewing, just to name a few. The list goes on, on, and on when you have an unconverted mate.

These things inevitably strain relationships, even the very best of relationships. Satan does not have to guess how to pressure you to sin; he actually knows the holes in your armor. Your unconverted spouse may be a tool Satan will use virtually every single day of your life. This will put a strain on your marriage and may pressure you to compromise. If Satan is able to, he will use an unconverted mate to try to destroy you.

Dating (Part 2): The Proper Order of Things by Martin G. Collins (<http://www.cgg.org>)

People outside of the church live off of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, whereas you are striving to live off the tree of life. Simply put, you are not equally yoked.

II Corinthians 6:14-17 Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers. For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness? And what accord has Christ with Belial? Or what part has a believer with an unbeliever? And what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For you are the temple of the living God. As God has said: "I will dwell in them and walk among them. I will be their God, and they shall be My people." Therefore "Come out from among them and be separate, says the Lord. Do not touch what is unclean, and I will receive you."

The word used here for "*unequally yoked*" is *heterozugeoo* and means "to bear a different yoke, to be yoked heterogeneously." It is applied to the custom of yoking animals of different kinds together; and as used here means not to mingle together, or be united with unbelievers.

It is implied in the use of the word that there is dissimilarity between believers and unbelievers so great that it is as improper for them to mingle together as it is to yoke animals of different kinds and species. The ground of the command is that there is such a great difference between Christians and those who are not, as to render such unions improper and injurious both spiritually and physically.

The term "unequally yoked" refers to all kinds of improper connections with those who were unbelievers. It is often related to marriage. But, there is no reason for confining its meaning to marriage only. It obviously includes any other intimate connection, or to intimate friendships, or to participation in any close personal social and employment situations.

They were not to be united with them in any way or sense where it would be obvious that they were partakers with them in those worldly things. This principle is as applicable now as it was then. In the remainder of this verse and the following verses, Paul states reasons why they should have no such contact.

Last part of verse 14 again: "For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness?" Its primary principle covers such things as: idolatry, sin, wickedness, extravagance, wastefulness, recklessness, debauchery; as well as, dishonesty, deception, and fraud. But, it does not stop there. It also includes:

Dating (Part 2): The Proper Order of Things by Martin G. Collins (<http://www.cgg.org>)

entertainment, amusement and pleasure that is entirely worldly and sinful in its nature; that are completely under worldly influence.

Expanding the principles covered, we find that there is a large area of thoughts and actions which are common with the Christian and the world; where we are not expected to abandon God's truth or compromise righteous conduct. This large area covers: commercial transactions and professional engagements that are conducted on honest and upright principles, even when those with whom we interact are not Christians. It covers literary and scientific pursuits, which never (when pursued with a right spirit) interfere with the principles of Christianity, and are never contrary to it; and, the love and affection that are due to relatives and friends; and, in doing good to others. These things do not fall under this "unequally yoked" principle.

The main reason that Paul tells us that there should be no intimate connection with the world is that there can be no fellowship, no communion, nothing in common between them; and that therefore we should be separate. The word "fellowship" means partnership, participation.

What is there in common? Or how can the one socialize with the other? The interrogative form here is designed to be emphatic, and to declare in the strongest terms that there can be no such partnership with people in the world who do worldly things and pressure you to do them as well.

II Corinthians 6:15-17 And what accord has Christ with Belial? Or what part has a believer with an unbeliever? And what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For you are the temple of the living God. As God has said: "I will dwell in them and walk among them. I will be their God, and they shall be My people." Therefore "Come out from among them and be separate, says the Lord. Do not touch what is unclean, and I will receive you."

The principal idea is that as there is an entire separation between light and darkness in their nature; as they have nothing in common, so it is and should be, between Christians and sinners. There should be a natural separation because there can be nothing in common between holiness and sin; and Christians should have nothing to do "with the unfruitful works of darkness:" This is not to say that you cannot have an acquaintance or be a friend with someone in the world in a general sense. We should be our brother's keeper. It is talking about intimate social relationships, as well as close partnerships in business, where one person is doing things against God's principles.

Dating (Part 2): The Proper Order of Things by Martin G. Collins (<http://www.cgg.org>)

The desires of your heart must be according to God's will; they must be in-sync with His purpose for you.

James 4:1-4 Where do wars and fights come from among you? Do they not come from your desires for pleasure that war in your members? You lust and do not have. You murder and covet and cannot obtain. You fight and war. Yet you do not have because you do not ask. [According to His plan and purpose.] You ask and do not receive, because you ask amiss, that you may spend it on your pleasures. [Including wrong desires, that you may spend it on your lusts.] Adulterers and adulteresses! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity [hatred, hostility] with God? Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.

This shows that it is wrong (especially for a baptized member of God's church) to go out and drag someone from the world to date with the intention of converting him or her for the purpose of marriage. Of course, it gets back to the proper order of things, of using wisdom. There is a proper way that it should be done, and if it is done that way, by those three points that I gave you, God is able to work with people and actually bring them to a far greater and far less painful entry into His church. Why would a converted member of God's church even look there? That is idolatry, a sin. It is idolatry because that worldly person has become the focus of your attention and has interfered with God's purpose for you.

Can we make an idol of another individual or a group? According to Webster's New Universal Unabridged Dictionary, an idol is any object of ardent or excessive devotion or admiration. If we obey the dictates of another person, our family, our church, or some other group contrary to the direct commands of God, we are guilty of idolatry. The individual or group becomes the object of idolatry, superseding the Sovereign God of the universe and beyond. These are very serious things that we are to be concerned about.

Ultimately in the New Testament, idolatry came to mean, not only the giving to any creature or human creation the honor or devotion which belongs to God alone, but the giving to any human desire precedence over God's will.

I Peter 4:1-5 Therefore, since Christ suffered for us in the flesh, arm yourselves also with the same mind, for he who has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin, that he no longer should live the rest of his time in the flesh for the lusts of men, but for the will of God. For we have spent enough of our

Dating (Part 2): The Proper Order of Things by Martin G. Collins (<http://www.cgg.org>)

past lifetime in doing the will of the Gentiles [the will of the world]—when we walked in lewdness, lusts, drunkenness, revelries, drinking parties, and abominable idolatries. In regard to these, they [the world] think it strange that you do not run with them in the same flood of dissipation, speaking evil of you. They will give an account to Him who is ready to judge the living and the dead.

We can never be part of the world when we are in God's church, because behind our backs they will be speaking evil of us for what we do. Dating outside the church has serious consequences. There is a difference between those who are already married to an unbeliever and those who are seeking to be.

Paul addresses the first group of people. They are already yoked to an unbeliever. This passage contains instructions on how to deal with the situation.

I Corinthians 7:12-16 But to the rest I, not the Lord, say: If any brother has a wife who does not believe, and she is willing to live with him, let him not divorce her. And a woman who has a husband who does not believe, if he is willing to live with her, let her not divorce him. For the unbelieving husband is sanctified by the wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified by the husband; otherwise your children would be unclean, but now they are holy. [God can forgive the sin of marrying someone in the world, if they remain an unbeliever, but it is a painful process, nevertheless.] But if the unbeliever departs, let him depart; a brother or a sister is not under bondage in such cases. But God has called us to peace. [Peace is something that God highly values in a marriage, and if there is no peace He extends the option of divorce, but it is a last option.] For how do you know, O wife, whether you will save your husband? Or how do you know, O husband, whether you will save your wife?

God gives couples, where one is unconverted, a wonderful hope and encouragement here. We just do not know whether God is going to call them, but He may very well. We have seen it happen regularly, but not in most cases. The same holds true for dating. How do we know if we pre-empt or if we get the proper order of things out of order, how do we know if God is really calling a person if we have interfered with what God is working out?

I Corinthians 7:17 But as God has distributed to each one, as the Lord has

Dating (Part 2): The Proper Order of Things by Martin G. Collins (<http://www.cgg.org>)

called each one, so let him walk. And so I ordain in all the churches.

It is not saying that it is something to be sought after, because verse 39 tells these readers to marry in the church if they ever get the chance to remarry.

I Corinthians 7:39 A wife is bound by law as long as her husband lives; but if her husband dies, she is at liberty to be married to whom she wishes, only in the Lord.

Some situations that are not necessarily wrong may put you in partnership with unbelievers. Businesses, marriages, close and equal partnerships with unbelievers may bring you into situations that will compromise your walk with God. Do not become burdened with an unbeliever even if a situation in itself is not wrong. If it binds you to an unbeliever, it is unwise and wrong.

Do not date just anyone; especially not someone who will bring you down spiritually. I Corinthians 15:33: "Do not be deceived: 'Evil company corrupts good habits'". Again, it is something that we have all seen, time and time again, when some singles in the church have gone and dated in the world and it has brought them down.

It is wise not to date someone whose character or faith will lead you away from God and His way of life. Ancient Israel was warned not to intermarry (that is, have marriages, treaties and common religion) with the nations around them lest their heart be turned from Him.

If you are deeply committed to God, do not allow yourself to become unequally yoked with an unbeliever. You may expect to convert your spouse at some future date, but it is God who calls a person to His truth. That does happen on occasion, but to count on it is risky at best and foolhardy at worst.

Again, this is the question that must be answered: "Just how critical is it that my husband (or wife) shares my faith?" If it is essential and non-negotiable, as scripture tells us it should be for believers, then that matter should be given the highest priority in the decision to marry.

Often singles live with a lack of hope, a feeling that an enjoyable, fulfilling, committed marital relationship is impossible. They have seen or experienced the devastation of divorce. You have heard the expression: "The light at the end of the tunnel has been

Dating (Part 2): The Proper Order of Things by Martin G. Collins (<http://www.cgg.org>)

turned off." This is the way most of our singles feel when it relates to dating and marriage. Relating to finances: "Due to a lack of funds, the light at the end of the tunnel has been turned off!" Single women in God's church may express it this way: "Due to a lack of guys, hope has been turned off." I am sure the single guys feel a similar emotion. Believe it or not, the rest of us agonize and suffer with you, especially if we have sons and daughters in this situation.

These statements express the hopelessness that people often feel when frustrations seem to have no solution. Singles reach the point of despair when the prospect of dating and marriage seem out of reach. Hopelessness sets in when a desire is not accompanied by the expectation or belief that it will be fulfilled.

To hope means to look forward to something with confidence of its fulfillment. In everyday conversation, people often say "hope" when they mean "wish." When we say, "Let us hope it all works out for the best," it sometimes means, "We are afraid it will not."

When a person is given the opportunity to know God's truth and fails to act on this hope, he becomes like the individual described in the Parable of the Talents in Matthew 25:25, who refused to produce with the one talent given to him. In an attempt to justify his failure, he replied, "I was afraid." He possessed no vision for the future. He had no hope!

It has been said, that as human beings, "We hope vaguely but dread precisely." It seems we put more effort into dreading than hoping. Most singles dread the idea of being lonely for the rest of their lives, and they dwell too often on it.

Though we realize that God's Kingdom will be set up on earth and we desire to be part of it, still there are times when we all despair over it with fear and self-doubt. These hopeless attitudes come from Satan who knows God's Kingdom is coming and has no hope for himself. This is the attitude that he sends to us that the kingdom will never come and that there is no hope.

Speaking generically of hope, a man named O. S. Marden observed that, "The hopeful man sees success where others see failure, sunshine where others see shadows and storm". In our own observation of hopeful people, we can say that they are optimistic. They look at the good that will eventually come from the object of their desire.

But even an optimistic attitude is not enough. True godly hope is confident, powerful, and bold.

Dating (Part 2): The Proper Order of Things by Martin G. Collins (<http://www.cgg.org>)

It is not afraid, and actually casts out fear and doubt. It is positive, assured; looking ahead to the future, that God has in store for them. True hope sees God's plan at work, and knows that God wants almost every single to be married.

Romans 8 is sometimes referred to as the hope chapter. Paul goes so far as to say, we were saved in this hope.

Romans 8:24-25 For we were saved in this hope, but hope that is seen is not hope; for why does one still hope for what he sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, we eagerly wait for it with perseverance. [There is a key term with hope, and that is perseverance. True hope takes real perseverance.]

Paul reminds us here that we should be anticipating our resurrection into the Kingdom of God. Meanwhile we are preserved and sustained through our trials, in this hope. Moffatt translates the first third of verse 24: "We were saved with this hope ahead." This hope sustains us in the midst of trials and enables us to bear them without complaining. Once we start complaining, we start being negative.

Hope is a complex emotion, made up of an earnest desire, and an expectation of obtaining something. It refers to something anticipated in the future, as of yet unseen. But, when the object is seen, or actually in our possession, it is no longer an object of our hope. Moffatt renders the second third of verse 24: "Now when an object of hope is seen, there is no further need to hope."

As a single, you may hope you meet that special someone, and when you do meet that interesting someone you can no longer hope to meet him, and so your hope is fulfilled.

The last third of verse 24 tells us in the form of a question that what a person has, he cannot hope for or look forward to with anticipation. As a single, when you find that special person, there is no need to continue looking for that special person. Who keeps looking after they find him? Sadly, many worldly people do continue to hope for another conquest, which is a good reason for singles in the church to not look for someone in the world!

Romans 8:25 But if we hope for what we do not see, we eagerly wait for it with perseverance.

Dating (Part 2): The Proper Order of Things by Martin G. Collins (<http://www.cgg.org>)

The Living Translation (which is actually a paraphrase) expands it in this way: "But if we must keep trusting God for something that hasn't happened yet, it teaches us to wait patiently and confidently." Perseverance is translated from a Greek term meaning "patiently," "with endurance," or "with fortitude." God wants us to have hope in Him, by working for it with perseverance and patience.

Faith and hope, though distinct, are vitally united. They come from the same source, are sustained by the same evidence, and are exercised by the same works. Faith is the perceiving and hope is the anticipation. Faith comes by hearing, and hope comes by experience. Faith relates to the truth of the word, and hope relates to the truth's fulfillment.

Romans 5:3-4 And not only that, but we also glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance; and perseverance, character; and character, hope.

As you develop character, it produces hope; therefore, during your ordeal, you should be becoming a better person. That is part of your preparation for marriage. This principle involving hope applies to all aspects of life, but for a baptized member of God's church, who has the help of the Holy Spirit, there is never any disappointment in this spirit-motivated hope.

Romans 5:5 Now hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us.

If you persevere in this hope that God will provide you with the right mate at the right time, then you will not be disappointed. That is part of the love of God. God has a very strong love for you singles. He wants you to have happiness and He wants you to be married. Faith and hope are very important aspects.

True hope fills us with zeal and purpose. It makes us feel alive with spiritual energy. It drives us to keep overcoming and growing no matter what negative factors and influences are at work to discourage and frustrate our progress toward God's Kingdom.

If we live a life of sin—disobedient to God's commands—we are abandoning any hope He may provide. If the target of our hope is in being like Jesus Christ, we will be committed to keeping ourselves from sin. Our aim is to be like Him in perseverance and righteous character.

Dating (Part 2): The Proper Order of Things by Martin G. Collins (<http://www.cgg.org>)

True hope means looking forward confidently with faith to the fulfillment of God's glorious plan for us as individuals. Part of that plan is the marriage covenant, which He desires the vast majority of people to enjoy and grow within with the right person.

Psalm 130:5 I wait for the LORD, my soul waits, and in His word I do hope.

God has promised to give us the desires of our heart, if we ask according to His will. The virtue of waiting on God is united with hope and expectancy. To wait is to anticipate the time that God will act. He will act at the proper time. When God acts, it will be the best possible time for you and your future mate. If you do not interfere with what God is working out in your life, it will be done according to His will and within His timeframe—therefore, nothing could be better.

Are you singles taking advantage of what God, the Sovereign Power of the universe, has made available to you? He has offered each of you something that is unshakeable and steadfast. He is presenting you with something that is set before you as an encouragement. He has given you, through faith, access to the real hope of a wonderfully joyful and bright future.

Patiently wait and persevere according to God's will and instructions, do not try to do it your way by looking outside the church, and He will give you the desires of your heart.

Micah 7:7 Therefore I will look to the LORD; I will wait for the God of my salvation; my God will hear me.

Next time I speak on this subject, I will cover such things as: intercultural/interracial marriage, waiting on God, love at first sight, and the greatest gift. I will answer some more of the questions that some of you have asked regarding dating and marriage.