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The Role of Traditions in a Christian Wedding

In order to demonstrate the emptiness of a contemporary wedding and the richness of a traditional wedding, follow the story of a young bride from her childhood through her wedding. She is unaware that her wedding as a whole rejects the wisdom of tradition, to which she should submit. Although she is submitting to the ritual marriage, her modern world view dismisses her cultural, traditional heritage. Since God ordained marriage, by staging a wedding our bride is submitting to the Christian ritual marriage, yet she surrounds it in non-Christian traditions.

From early childhood, every girl fantasizes about the day when she will say "I do." As a toddler, this is conveyed by the comical covering of her head and parading around, saying "I'm getting married." Slowly, as her awareness grows, a frilly dress and bouquet are added to her ensemble. Then a train, veil, and pretend ceremonies follow, with bridal magazines in their wake.

When the day finally arrives and the young bride is preparing to walk down the aisle, intentionally unaccompanied by her father, she realizes that this wedding was not the one she had so carefully planned in her childhood. Why have so many years of planning dwindled down to this? Because the traditions of yesterday have been replaced by modern trends, and the rituals of the past are obscured by secular "innovations." Since most people do not understand the traditions in which they take part, the ignorance of tradition in weddings has become prevalent in

the twentieth century. Increasingly, people have begun to write their own vows, create their own ceremonies, and have the general mindset that the wedding belongs to the couple, not the culture. In shaping their weddings around themselves, instead of their culture, many couples disregard the fact that culture should instead be shaping them and their wedding. Unfortunately, the majority of this society has lost all knowledge of what a true wedding really means (Wilson, D. A Traditional Wedding 1).

Change is not always good. Why? It could be foolishly running from years of wisdom. To ignore that wisdom is to be ignorant. In his article "A Traditional Wedding" Douglas Wilson stated, "Those who blindly follow tradition and those who blindly throw traditions overboard share at least ignorance in common. One keeps what he does not know, another throws away what he does not know" (1).

According to the Oxford English Dictionary, tradition is "the transmission of customs or beliefs from generation to generation." Some of these traditions may seem trivial, such as keeping elbows off the table. Others universally carry more weight, like saying please and thank you. By observing even the seemingly insignificant traditions that have been passed down, an authoritative presence is given to those who have come before. We should acknowledge that their voice is that of experience and maturity.

Traditions are not just events or rituals that someone made up and then called a tradition. Rather they take generations consciously passing them down before being accepted as such. It is accumulated history that has survived and developed over time. Nearly all traditions are started by families who desire to pass on a heritage or ritual that is important to them and that they would like to see become important to society. Other times, traditions seem trivial and unimportant to outsiders, but are incredibly significant to the family from which they came; such

as wearing a specific article of clothing to church on Sunday, kissing on both cheeks, and the way the family partakes of the Lord's Supper. These traditions, in themselves, are not necessarily good or bad but are just personally meaningful to a certain family. While some are based on superstitions, such as viewing a black cat as an ill omen, others were created to better society, like devoting one day a year to the giving of thanks. But wherever these traditions originated, they must have had an important significance at some point, or else they would not have prevailed. Implementing them into their lives, they acknowledge the wisdom and maturity that gave them wings.

In his book Orthodoxy, G..K. Chesterton defines tradition as "the democracy of the dead," saying that people should give a voice to the traditions that their ancestors established (41). Understanding this democratic people's obsession with giving everyone a fair voice, he predicted they would ignore the traditions and opinions of those who have come before them. Chesterton went on to remind them that tradition is a good man's opinion and is not to be neglected. Modern man says that many of the traditions of their forefathers were made by ignorant, uneducated men. If that same logic is held, then the traditions *we* are using today, will one day be considered unsatisfactory and therefore invalid, because *we* will be considered by the coming generations as ignorant. Generally, traditions are made by democracy, "the mob," and are passed down from generation to generation. Objections to these traditions are typically put forth by historians, whose single "authoritative" opinions seem to carry merit. How can it be that these single opinions can refute the opinions of thousands? "It is trusting to a consensus of common human voices rather than to some isolated or arbitrary record" (Chesterton 41). Living in the early Twentieth Century, it is remarkable that Chesterton could so clearly foresee the rejection of tradition that has since swept the culture and tainted the society.

Society has engraved into the people the thought that they need novelty. Being persuaded that the new is good, that new is better, this culture arrogantly assumes that they can create something superior to anyone before them. Having become self centered, they believe that for some reason they will not make the same mistakes as their ancestors. As Kopff contended "I can see no logic ... in Americans deserting Western culture at a time when they see the fruits of that culture desired all over the world" (22). So why do Americans seek the new? What makes the new better? How can they, as such a small speck on the time line of history, arrogantly think that they have the right to change traditions that have existed for thousands of years? With time and experience comes maturity, and maturity produces wisdom. Again Kopff affirms, "Human fulfillment ... requires nourishment from the past. Our very future, which is born of our past, demands it" (10). Ignoring those who have come before, and their vast wealth of insight, makes them the ignorant ones, for they had much knowledge. By observing their traditions, Americans impart their wisdom to their descendants. Being wise they will see the beauty of these traditions and the wisdom they hold.

In The Poet and The Lunatic, G.K. Chesterton's poet Gabriel Gale meets a brilliant scientist devoted to the cause of emancipation from tradition and social convention one evening at an informal gathering. Gale and the scientist are discussing with a few friends the scientist's philosophy when Gale realizes that the scientist is mad. The poet rushes everybody away from the house just before the scientist blows it sky-high. Gale later explains to his bewildered friends that his suspicions were alerted by seeing three goldfish gasping desperately in a pool of water on a table in the library. In accordance with his philosophy, the scientist had liberated them from their bowl ... (Kopff 3).

Desiring to be liberated from tradition, Americans have broken the bowl of culture which keeps

them alive. It must be understood that these traditions are not shackling, but shaping. They are the fishbowl of the society; dictating the way things were, the way things are, and the way things will be in the future.

In the past century society has successfully smashed the goldfish bowl that has kept the family unit intact. Rejecting the traditional roles of authority in the family has removed its security, not its barriers. Familiarity has led to disrespect and individualism has splintered the modern family. Mothers head off to work, and leave their children to be trained by strangers. The teenage children are rarely at home because their friends are more important to them than their home life. Fathers have no desire to come home to a house in disarray. At dinner, if there even is a set time, the family seldom joins together. If the family, as the base government set by God, cannot stand by itself how can the rest of society? Friedrich Nietzsche had the insight to predict that in the course of the twentieth century "the family will be slowly ground into a random collection of individuals ... in the common pursuit of selfish ends" (Tipton 244).

In the three governments created by God, the governments of Family, Church, and State, it is perceived that there is a need to have traditions that uphold authority. Without these traditions, the three governments would likely fail. Tradition plays an authoritative role in society by keeping order among the people and among the community. The family would cease to be a true family if the parents no longer were in authority, the Church could no longer be called a church without an authoritative leader, a pastor or elder, and the nation's government would fall into chaos if Americans stopped respecting the authority of the President. As a whole these truths are generally agreed upon. For example, the family authority is still recognized and upheld by the tradition of children not calling their parents by their first names. In the Church the clergy are given respect and their authority is often distinguished by the clothes they wear. In this

society the military is built upon the categorized line of authority. Disregarding its chain of command would be detrimental to America's national security, because the military would fall into chaos. In a courtroom a judge's authority is acknowledged by the tradition of all rising as he enters. If someone decided not to stand, they could be thrown out of the court room for not adhering to the traditional sign of submission. Therefore Americans should continue to submit to the traditions laid before them by God and their ancestors. The presence of authority is weakened where these traditions are not continued. An example of this degradation is the wedding or marriage ceremony in western society. Instead of following the modern wedding industry, Christians should examine the wedding from a traditional, biblical standpoint, making Scripture the final authoritative guide. Applying this view, Christians should submit to tradition, learn what those traditions mean, and under what context they originated.

Picture again the bride, surrounded by her attendants she emotionally reading from a slip of paper, the vows she wrote for her groom, "I want him to know how much he means to me ... How much I love him ... I could not be without him, I want to make him smile, laugh and cry out of fun. I want to help him reach his dream. I want him to know what love feels like. How I will never leave him ... I will be by his side forever. ... he is my soul mate" (My Wedding Vows. Com). Among the sniffing crowd, a lone grandmother grieves at the sight of the young couple beginning their marriage, while ignoring the traditions that have been laid down for them by their ancestors. Wisely she realizes that the newlyweds have embarked on the most important journey of their lives, while rejecting the time tested voice of tradition. "What has happened to the holy estate of matrimony?" she wonders. "Where is the vow 'to have and to hold from this day forward, for better for worse, for richer for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love, cherish, and to obey, till us do part. ... so long as ye both shall live? Is the young bride so naive as to assume

that there will be no bad times that her marriage will be brimming with fun?" Sadly, the new vow does not once acknowledge that there will be difficulties. Does she even understand what marriage is?

For thousands of years, the definition of marriage has been debated. As society changes, defining marriage becomes more difficult. In 1949, the eminent anthropologist George Peter Murdock defined marriage as, "a universal institution that involves a man and a woman living together, engaging in sexual activity, and cooperating economically" (Gough, Kathleen E. 28). Because in some cultures men and women who are married do not live together, this definition broke down and was quickly dismissed. Faced with so many exceptions to Murdock's definition of marriage, the Royal Anthropological Institute of Britain attempted to formulate a definition. They focused on the role of marriage by determining the status and rights of children, defining marriage as "a union between a man and a woman such that children born to the woman are the recognized legitimate offspring of both partners" (28). This definition also proves faulty due to the fact that polygamy is legal in some countries. In David Popenoe's book *War Over The Family*, Frayser defines marriage as "a relationship within which a society approves and encourages sexual intercourse and the birth of children" (100). This begs the question, what about homosexual relationships, and marriages between men and women who cannot parent children; are they then not married? In Kathleen Gough's article "The Nayars and the Definition of Marriage," Edmund Leach suggests, that "Marriage should be seen as being more about regulating property than regulating sex and child rearing. He argues that marriage is 'the set of legal rules' that govern how goods, titles, and social status 'are handed down from generation to generation'" (28). This approach, however, does not work in societies where an inheritance can be passed to a child born out of wedlock. Even with these options of definitions, defining

marriage in a pagan nation is challenging. With same sex relationships being more and more readily accepted as legal marriage, it will be impossible for Christians to define marriage in a way acceptable to non-Christians. Be that as it may, marriage can be defined as, "The legal union of a man and woman as husband and wife." (American Heritage Dictionary) " For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh" (Mat. 19.5 NKJV).

Although the ritual of marriage and the ceremony of marriage are quite similar, the difference between the two is very important to understand. The ritual, is the act of joining two as one; the "I do." The ceremony, is the process that brings this union about; all of the pageantry.

In the ritual of marriage, attention is placed on the fact that the bride and groom actually become married. It does not contain all the pomp, grandeur, and traditions, which the wedding ceremony does. Even though every culture's form of marriage is different, all recognize the basic ritual of marriage, as a normal, practical, and everyday occurrence. Yet it is often celebrated in very unpractical ways. "The rite symbolically formulates the relationship" (Prell 55). The ritual itself cannot change, but the traditions within it can, continually do, and will continue to do so.

In the ceremony, however, the focus is given to when and how certain things are said and done. It is a celebration of the couple's entrance into the state of matrimony, and concentrates on the traditions that make up the ritual marriage. For Christians, these traditions should look different than those of a non-believer's. However, most Christians do not even know what the most common traditions mean, or where and how they originated. Understanding how the ritual marriage has progressed through history, will help one grasp a fuller comprehension of some of these traditions and how they have emerged.

As the starting point, door, or initiation of a marriage, the wedding ceremony should be

strong and able to keep out that which is unwanted. No one would put a paper-thin door on the front of their house. Why would anyone accept less for their marriages? Truly, the wedding in significant ways sets a pattern for the marriage that follows. Even though the substance of the house, which is the marriage relationship of the woman and man, is beyond the door, it would be shameful to plan a wedding without thinking of it as the beginning of marriage. A Godly wedding ought to reflect the man and woman's beliefs, as well as portray their adoration for and service to God, instead of focusing on the bride and groom. As Nancy Wilson put it "Our Lord graced a wedding at Cana with His presence; we want him to be present at ours!" (Wilson, Nancy. *A Beautiful 2*). Therefore, Christians need to strive to give Him a reason to be there. The Christian wedding still is a part of the wedding ritual, the same basic contract is being made, yet it should stand out as different from the cultural norm. In his letter to the saints at Ephesus, Paul said that "a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh" (Ephesians 5.31). He does not say how or where they are to be joined; just that they are to become one. This is an example of the ritual of marriage.

If the wedding is the entrance into marriage, as a door is the entrance to a house, then it should be beautifully decorated, but more importantly there should be an understanding of what this door is. Unfortunately, the thought process, in today's society, has become, "this is my wedding and this is the way I want it." Instead, it should be, "this is a wedding and this is the way a wedding should be done." In the struggle for the "perfect wedding," all respect for Christ, as the center of the wedding, has been lost. So, making the wedding aesthetically beautiful is not wrong, but that is not to be the first priority in the design of a wedding.

Marriage is a lifelong commitment for which Christians should carefully prepare. For Christians, the vow made at the wedding is a vow between the couple and God and is a life long

vow. "If a man makes a vow to the LORD, or swears an oath to bind himself by some agreement, he shall not break his word; he shall do according to all that proceeds out of his mouth" (Num. 30.2). When a man makes a vow to God, he is obligated to keep it. Likewise when a man and woman marry, the vow they make together before God must be kept. Because of the seriousness of the commitment being made, "till death do us part," great thoughtfulness should be taken in the planning of the wedding ceremony.

Imagine as the bride and groom exchange rings at the front of the exquisitely decorated sanctuary, they are oblivious to the centuries of weddings preceding theirs, and the drastic changes that have occurred. Sadly, since the creation of man, and the first marriage in the Garden of Eden, weddings have evolved into a celebration of the couple, rather than a celebration of the sacrament. There is a new importance now; it is the bride and groom's wedding and everything about it should reflect them.

Weddings have been around since the beginning of history. As time has progressed, these weddings have become more recorded and noticed. Adam and Eve, the first couple, were married by God and therefore began the ritual of marriage. Since then, there have been countless numbers of weddings, some plain, some magnificently grand, in different countries, implementing diverse traditions, yet they all have been a part of the ritual marriage.

During biblical times the protestant cathedral or church, had not been built; therefore, there was not a specific place where a wedding would be held. Nor was it attended by the pomp and circumstance that has evolved more recently. The wedding of Isaac and Rebekah, along with the marriage of Boaz to Ruth are two examples of weddings mentioned in Scripture. Isaac married Rebekah because his father's servant chose her for him. Abraham sent his servant to find a wife for his son and he in turn sought the Lord's direction in choosing. "And the servant told

Isaac all the things that he had done. Then Isaac brought her into his mother Sarah's tent; and he took Rebekah and she became his wife, and he loved her... " (Genesis 24.66-67). Boaz married Ruth so that her dead husband's name would be intact. "And Boaz said to the elders and all the people, 'You are witnesses this day ... Ruth ... I have acquired as my wife, to perpetuate the name of the dead You are witnesses this day.' And all the people who were at the gate, and the elders, said, 'We are witnesses ...'" (Ruth 4.9-11). Both weddings were simply a covenantal vow between the couple and God. This made these weddings simply the ritual marriage, with no mentioned ceremony. There was no defined location where the wedding took place, it simply did. For Ruth and Boaz, their marriage was contracted at the city gate with the townspeople as witnesses. All that is known about Isaac and Rebekah's marriage is that "she became his wife." It was that simple.

The Renaissance brought the rise of the cathedral as the prominent structure among the high classes of society. It was in these newly built structures, that the nobility held their weddings. With the creation of the cathedral the significance of the ritual of marriage began to diminish, and the focus on the ceremonial side of the wedding increased. At this time there was a shift from focusing on Christ at the wedding to focusing on the couple at the wedding.

In 1503, during the Renaissance, James IV and Margaret Tudor were married. The historical descriptions of their wedding, discuss the bride's attire, the cost of the wedding, and the amount of food served at their reception. None of them mention the covenant vow being made between the couple and God, even though both of them claimed to be Christians. An article titled "The Undiscovered Scotland" talks about the time and place of the wedding, and "Tudor History" discusses how much their wedding would cost today, along with a detailed account of their fifteen-course reception. There is still no talk about the vow that was made.

Society today has pulled even farther away from the biblical wedding than the people during the Renaissance. Outside of Christian circles, little to no respect is given to the biblical vow made between the couple and God. The average American girl dreams about her perfect wedding, focusing entirely on the bride and groom and rarely on the Creator of marriage. Today's American culture, has accepted many pagan traditions into the wedding ceremony. However, it is also highly possible to attend a Christian wedding and see multiple traditions practiced, for which the couple is unaware of the true meaning. In shaping the "perfect wedding" the American culture has ingrained in young girls the opinion that they should be happy with nothing less. Even outside of the American culture this is happening. In Britain, Princess Diana succumbed to the thought that she needed the perfect wedding, having among other things, a twenty-five foot long train on her wedding dress! The heir to Britain's ancient throne with his beautiful princess-to-be, obliged admirers by holding a glittering, storybook wedding with all the royal trappings imaginable. Millions watched worldwide on television, as Charles and Diana exchanged vows at St. Paul's Cathedral on July 29, 1981. The public soaked up all the pomp and circumstance of the royal family. Tragically, their fairy tale didn't end "happily ever after."

To give an exhaustive history of the symbols in weddings one would need to go through each different tradition and determine what it signifies and where it originated. They could then chronologically line up the various traditions and discover how these symbols have changed throughout history. In doing so they would find that there are some traditions which were only used during biblical times like, the consummation on the wedding premises, where the bride and groom were accompanied to the bridegroom's chamber. (Wilson, Douglas. Traditional Wedding 2) Others were only used for periods of time between the biblical times and the present, such as the usage of standard wedding vows. An example of such vows is those found in the Book of

Common Prayer. Some are relatively new traditions, like the unity candle. This symbol of the bride and groom becoming one is a tradition that is only about thirty years old. Finally there are those traditions that have been commonly practiced since the beginning of time, such as feasting at the wedding ceremony.

The idea of hosting a feast for a special occasion is not new. Bible wedding feasts often lasted an entire week. We see in Judges Fourteen that Samson and Timnah's wedding feast lasted for a week, and in Genesis Laban commanded Jacob to finish Leah's bridal week before he would allow him to begin working for Rachel. The whole community attended these weddings. If the cost of the wedding was a great strain and the family was not going to be able to provide a large feast, the community would come together and help with the preparations. The eighteenth century's distinction of three classes of society often brought bankruptcy to those in the lower classes who wanted to have as elaborate a wedding as those ranked above them. Since it was not possible for the average middle class family to have a feast that lasted several days, the one-day wedding appeared. With the shortened wedding feast came the idea that the wedding was a matter of individual choice and preference. (Waggoner 106) A wedding feast could then consist of anything from hors d'oeuvres to a sit down dinner with multiple courses.

Envision a romantic love song playing in the background as the couple steps off the stage preparing to light the unity candle. As they each lift the candle their parents lit, they both recognize that the unity candle represents the two becoming one, yet they do not understand its true biblical significance. The unity candle was established to represent more than the two becoming one physically, it represented the two becoming one in Christ, portraying for the world the relationship between Christ and His church.

The church is the bride of Christ, and Christ rejoices over his bride. As Isaiah said "For as

a young man marries a virgin, So shall your sons marry you; And as the bridegroom rejoices over the bride, So shall your God rejoice over you" (62.5). The groom rejoices over his bride not only as his bride, but because of her beauty as well. The union between "God and man, Christ and the Church, is symbolized as a sexual union" (Jones 2). "Obviously, as a wedding is conducted, and the marriage is consummated, the beauty of the bride is alluring to the bridegroom: it is sexual"(Wilson, Douglas. Her Hand 73). Paul is not just speaking of the ethical and intellectual aspects of marriage he is also speaking of the physical side, the bodies. "'Savior of the body' (v. 23), the husband's body (v. 28), nourishing and cherishing our "flesh" (v. 29), Christ's "flesh and bones" (v. 30) ... "' (Jones 2). "A man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh" (Eph. 5.31). Therefore the marriage of a man and woman should be shaped after the marriage of Christ and the Church, in all aspects, because Christ and the Church is the example of the perfect union. "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" (Eph 5.23-24). Scripture gives a picture of how Christ loved the Church and gave himself for her. These verses are given so that a husband can know how he should love his wife.

As traditions evolve over time there has to be purposeful thought given to how they change. Wedding traditions should not be disregarded because certain aspects of the wedding ceremony are disliked. This flippant attitude permeates American weddings today. Rather, having a biblical perspective of the Christian wedding and viewing all traditions through that biblical world view should be the way wedding traditions are made. If a tradition is to be changed, then the focus of the tradition must be placed on God, remembering that he created marriage and has presented marriage as a picture of Christ and the Church. "Like everything else

in life, a wedding ceremony that is not directly related to the Lord Jesus Christ loses its real significance" (The True significance 6). "We must focus on God, the creator of marriage, and honor Him in all our planning and celebrating"(Nancy Wilson. A Beautiful 2). Therefore if Christians are to change traditions they must mold them around the biblical perspective of the Christian wedding.

Can Christians say which traditions are biblically sound? Yes, with the Word of God as their guide they can. This process, however may become arduous; thus, making it easier to say which traditions are not biblically sound. A Christian wedding should not incorporate pagan traditions - even those that originated as a pagan tradition, but have since changed usage.

The custom of throwing the garter is a pagan tradition that dates back to the fourteenth century, "when bedding the bride was a popular custom." "The unmarried men taking part in the tradition tried to snatch the brides garter for good luck. It's believed that brides, not enjoying this manhandling, began removing their garters and flinging them at the crowd." (Seleshanko 127) This brought about the modern garter toss.

The ring bearer is the predecessor of an altar boy who participated in the ritual of presenting offerings to the gods during weddings in ancient Rome. "Couples presented an offering in the form of wheat cakes to the god Jupiter. They also repeated prayers to Juno the goddess of marriage." (Chesser 206-207) Because of the pagan basis of these traditions, they should not be implemented into the Christian wedding ceremony.

The traditions of a Christian wedding should bloom from God's covenant relationship with Israel and Christ's relationship with the believer. Some traditions began without either a biblical or pagan base, but have since evolved into traditions with biblical significance - such as the father giving the bride away. During the time of marriage by purchase, the father would

physically hand over the bride. Now the father walks the bride down the aisle and "gives" her away. The father of the bride walks the bride down the aisle to signify two things. First, that he is giving her to God's choice for her. Second, that he is giving to the groom his daughter whom he has raised up as a pure bride; for he as her father, is responsible for her purity. The bride's father said, "I gave my daughter to this man as wife ..." (Deut. 22.16). For Christians this tradition represents the scriptural description of the differences of the son leaving the home and being joined to his wife and the daughter being given away. Unfortunately for non-Christians this does not have the same significance. They only observe this tradition, because it has been observed for years.

Though times may change, God's Word does not, so being a virtuous woman means the same today as it did in Ruth's day. "Being virtuous means being holy, righteous, upright, and pure. We are declared righteous in Christ, and we are given virtue through Christ's justification: 'For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him' (2 Cor. 5.21)" (Virtuous Women 1). Christ's excellence and virtue and perfection are exchanged for man's sinfulness, and man is made righteous in Him. This is the gift that is received in our justification. Christians are made perfect in Christ because Christ is perfect, not because man is. The white wedding dress does not, as most think, represent the purity of the bride physically. It represents, however, the purity of her heart which the husband is then responsible for in the life of his new bride. He is to cleanse her with the Word of God just as Christ purified the believers with His Word.

"Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish,

but holy and blameless. In this same way, husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies ..." (Eph 5.25-28).

"In embroidered garments she is led to the king; her virgin companions follow her and are brought to you" (Psalm 45.14). The tradition of bridal attendants dates back to biblical times and is in fact a Christian tradition. Traditionally these attendants were unmarried and represented purity in the wedding, today; however, they might be married. "In the Middle Ages, the maid or matron of honor was there not only to support her friend and act as a witness but to testify that the bride wasn't being forced into marriage - that she was willingly going to the altar" (Seleshanko 27).

The best man and groomsmen date back to the time when brides were captured. Since the bride's family might come after the bride the groomsmen were there to assist the groom in fighting them off. (27) Today the best man needs not be handy with a sword; instead he needs to be handy with words for he is mainly responsible to give a hardy toast. The best man is also responsible to drive the couple to the reception hearkening back to the days when he needed to protect them.

The wedding ring "symbolizes transfer of authority, strength and protection" (Institute in Basic Life Conflicts 14). It does not however represent eternal love between the man and woman, maybe between God and them but not between themselves, because the marriage covenant ends with the death of one partner and there are no marriages in Heaven. So, that well known speech given at weddings about the ring, being round, and representing eternal love is inaccurate. "The king took off his signet ring, which he had reclaimed from Haman, and presented it to Mordecai. And Esther appointed him over Haman's estate" (Esther 8.2). In the Bible the ring is used as a symbol of authority and the transfer thereof, and "In a covenant

relationship, the ring symbolizes identification" (Institute of Basic Life Conflicts 14). The rings represent the unity of a man and woman who have been joined together in matrimony. It is a symbol not to each other but to society that they are married.

Visualize with me the final stop of our story. The young couple has just been pronounced "man and wife." Sadly this couple has entered into their marriage never truly understanding the foundation they laid for their marriage. They were completely unaware of the true meanings of the traditions they were implementing. However they have made a sacred vow whether they realize it or not.

Even with freedom of choice concerning wedding traditions, everyone is still accountable for the traditions they use in their wedding. Christians therefore should submit to the traditions originally created by Christ. No guest ought to leave a Christian wedding without understanding the first tradition created by God, that the marriage is a covenant not a contract. Douglas Wilson said in his article, "A Traditional Wedding," "In our weddings," as Christians, "the vows are central to the ceremony, but the language of covenant -- language of blessings and curses -- should be much stronger" (2). No guest should be able to depart without understanding the covenantal union which was formed. Every tradition used not only reflects on the couple but on their guest as well. These guests have come to the wedding in support of the couple. Therefore, since Christians are responsible not only for how a tradition reflects on them as a couple but also on those that attend their marriage ceremony, they should be extremely careful which traditions they choose to adopt.

Let us as Christians defend what is ours, the traditional wedding. Douglas Wilson stated:

"The defense of traditional weddings may be divided into three categories. The first revolves around a discovery that many elements of our traditional wedding practices have their

roots in antiquity, and were observed in biblical weddings as well as in ours. The second category will be areas where we have a corresponding practice, but because we are uptight prigs, we do not practice these customs with the same enthusiasm. The third category are traditions which we have not adopted, or have lost, and which, if recovered, could greatly enrich our appreciation of weddings ...” (Traditional Wedding 1).

Our goal as Christians should be to redirect the self-centered mindset of our culture, for we have the basis to determine what the wedding is truly all about. We should defend the traditional wedding, and if change is to be made it should be in the direction of older, biblical customs rather than in the direction of new, contemporary non-biblical innovations.

Envision another story, where the young couple has just been pronounced “man and wife.” Their wedding reflected Christ in both the ritual and the ceremony, embracing the traditions of their Christian heritage. Joyfully this couple has entered into their marriage with Christ as the center of their union.

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