

The Wedding Bond or the Wedding Band?

In our Mennonite culture, we strive to live a life of simplicity and internal conviction rather than outward show. As we look at the traditions surrounding marriage, we must ask ourselves a vital question: Where is our security placed? Is it in the Wedding Bond or the Wedding Band? Marriage is not a modern invention. It is an institution created by God Himself. From the very beginning, Scripture defines what marriage is meant to be. The King James Version clearly teaches that marriage is between one man and one woman. *"Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall be joined unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh."* Genesis 2:24 This verse establishes the foundation for all marriages. A man leaves his parents, cleaves to his wife, and the two become one flesh. Marriage is not simply a relationship, but a covenant bond created before God.

Historically, wedding bands were not a mutual exchange but were given only to women as a promise of fidelity. The first wedding bands, dating back nearly 5,000 years to Ancient Egypt, were crafted from natural materials like braided reeds, hemp, papyrus, and leather. These materials were chosen because they were flexible and easy to shape into a circle. These materials were chosen for their flexibility, but as civilizations grew, they evolved into more durable materials such as bone, ivory, and eventually metals like iron, copper, and gold. But in those early cultures, the ring was not used in the same way it is today. Originally the ring was only given to women, not to men. The ring served as a sign that the woman was already promised to a man and that she belonged to a household. It was a symbol of fidelity and promise. In many societies, the ring was meant to show that the woman was taken. If she removed the ring, it could be seen as a sign of unfaithfulness or rejection of the marriage. One unusual tradition was the puzzle ring. This wedding band came in several interlocking parts, sometimes three or more pieces. The ring could only be assembled correctly in one way. The idea behind this design was that if an unfaithful wife removed the ring, she would not be able to quickly put it back together before her husband returned home. If the ring was apart, it revealed her unfaithfulness. Whether this tradition was widely practiced or not, it shows the mindset of those cultures: the ring was used as a tool of control and proof, rather than a symbol of mutual love.

For most of history, men did not wear wedding rings at all. The custom of both the husband and wife wearing rings is actually very recent. It was not until around the 20th century, especially during World War II, that many men began wearing wedding bands. Soldiers would wear rings as a reminder of their wives and families while they were away at war. After the war, the custom spread widely in Western culture. This historical shift shows something important: the ring itself has never been essential to marriage. It has always been a worldly tradition, not a biblical ideal. We know love must exist without external signs.

Today the wedding band has become something very different from its original traditions. The wedding band should not be the symbol of our faithfulness or a symbol of how successful we are. Yet in modern culture, many people focus more on the ring than on the marriage itself. Many women want a huge expensive ring to show off, but that is not what love and loyalty should be. The size of a diamond does not measure devotion. A ring cannot create faithfulness, and it cannot guarantee love. Even at many wedding ceremonies, the ring has become the central moment. Often the couple is asked to say the phrase: "With this ring I thee wed." But, a ring cannot seal a marriage. A ring cannot bind two souls together. A ring cannot establish the covenant that God created. Marriage is far deeper than a band of metal, or a cut of stone.

Scripture teaches that the real foundation of marriage is the spiritual bond between a husband and wife. The clearest passage explaining this is found in Ephesians. *"Submitting yourselves one to another in the fear of God."* Ephesians 5:21 Marriage is meant to reflect humility and reverence toward Christ. Paul then gives instruction to husbands: *"Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it."* Ephesians 5:25 This command sets an incredibly high standard. The husband must love his wife the way Christ loved the church — with sacrifice, patience, and selflessness. Paul then connects marriage back to the original design in Genesis: *"For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall be joined unto his wife, and they two shall be one flesh."* Ephesians 5:31 And finally he reveals the deeper meaning behind marriage: *"This is a great mystery: but I speak concerning Christ and the church."* Ephesians 5:32 Marriage is meant to reflect the relationship between Christ and His church. Another passage reinforces these roles: *"Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as it is fit in the Lord. Husbands, love your wives, and be not bitter against them."* Colossians 3:18–19 These commands reveal that the real strength of marriage is not in outward symbols, but in the daily practice of love, faithfulness, humility, and sacrifice.

Think about the moment when a man asks his girlfriend to marry him and she says yes. At that moment, are they married? No. But they are committed. Yes! That commitment eventually becomes a marriage when it is declared publicly before witnesses and established through vows in a ceremony. In the earliest marriages recorded in Scripture, rings were never mentioned. They were not needed to show commitment. The vows and the covenant were enough. The marriage existed because of the promises made before God and the community, not because of a piece of jewelry.

Because of this, we do not need to say, "With this ring I thee wed." What truly matters are the promises made in the vows. A husband should promise to love his wife, to always remain faithful, and above all else to lead her in holy matrimony and in a life that honors Christ. The wife should

vow to serve, guide, and help the husband. Together they support one another in obedience to God. The Bible also reminds us to keep the marriage bed pure and holy. Our love should be patient and kind, reflecting the love that Christ has shown to us.

We practice these things because one day Christ will come for His Bride, the Church. *“And a voice came out of the throne, saying, Praise our God, all ye his servants, and ye that fear him, both small and great. And I heard as it were the voice of a great multitude, and as the voice of many waters, and as the voice of mighty thunderings, saying, Alleluia: for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth. Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honour to him: for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife hath made herself ready. And to her was granted that she should be arrayed in fine linen, clean and white: for the fine linen is the righteousness of saints. And he saith unto me, Write, Blessed are they which are called unto the marriage supper of the Lamb. And he saith unto me, These are the true sayings of God.” Revelation 19:5-9* Our marriages is meant to reflect that future reality.

If our focus remains on earthly things like the wedding band and material things, our love becomes as fragile as a thin band of gold—it can break, it can be lost, and it can be cast off. Our relationship could become as fake as "gold-plated" jewelry—shiny on the outside but cheap underneath. But, if we focus on the Marriage Bond, we find a strength that doesn't require a physical ring to prove. The strength of marriage is not found in the band on the hand, but in the bond before God. If we have promised our lives to Christ; we must honor the marriage bond he set up. Our commitment is written in our daily lives, our sacrifices, and our faithfulness to the Covenant God created. When we focus on our marriage commitment, we are in the greatest rehearsal dinner here on earth. Thus we prepare for that great and mighty day: ***Blessed are they which are called unto the marriage supper of the Lamb!***

-Will Taylor