

## MODESTY IN DRESS

***Deuteronomy 22:5*** *The woman shall not wear that which pertaineth unto a man, neither shall a man put on a woman's garment: for all that do so are abomination unto the LORD thy God.*

The Hebrew word for “pertaineth” is *kālî*. According to James Strong, this word is not limited to clothes alone, but includes anything made or prepared by humans, such as implements, vessels, weapons, bags, carriages, furniture, instruments, jewels, pots, sacks and even other wares/goods. Bible readers have traditionally linked this verse to clothes alone, but God had a much broader list in mind. It is difficult to deny that the further from God society deviates, the more comfortable they become with that which formerly “pertaineth” to the opposite sex. Remember that this “pertaineth” is about that which is made with hands. When God made Adam and Eve he made them distinctly male and female, and he does not look kindly upon anyone who seeks to confuse or obfuscate this distinction.

The Greeks worshipped a deity called Agdistis who was androgynous, both male and female. The stories narrated about Agdistas, the child of Zeus, the head of the Greek pantheon, assaults the moral senses. Ultimately, Agdistas was destroyed. Although a myth, there is truth in the knowledge that what God has not made will ultimately be destroyed. It was not to the Jews, but the Greeks, who were far from the true God and hence morally depraved, that the apostle Paul declared the following:

***1Corinthians 14:33*** *For God is not the author of confusion, but of peace, as in all churches of the saints.*

Put differently, to make, prepare, own or wear that which belongs to the opposite sex is tantamount to rebelling against God’s purpose in creating the two sexes differently. God prides himself in creating with purpose and clarity; a horse cannot be confused with a tree neither can a human be confused with an ape. God once asked the prophet Jeremiah, “Moreover the word of the LORD came unto me, saying, Jeremiah, what seest thou? And I said, I see a rod of an almond tree. Then said the LORD unto me, Thou hast well seen: for I will hasten my word to perform it” (Jeremiah 1:11&12). God complimented Jeremiah’s ability to see and describe what was in plain sight – an almond tree. Inability to see and acknowledge the distinction in God’s creation is a reproach.

I once found myself walking behind a couple holding hands, both wearing identical jeans pants, T-shirts and sporting identical length of hair that reached to their hips. I kept guessing which one was male and which female. Even the anatomy of their bodies being similar appeared determined to conspire in hiding their sexes. It was impossible from where I walked, just a few meters behind the couple, to verify their sexes. Finally, when I was about to give up, I walked past them, looked back and with much relief was able to identify the male and the female. It was at that moment that the import of Deuteronomy 22:5 hit home: God wants more than just our faces and bodies to confirm his handiwork in creating us distinctly male and female.

In her article with the telling title "*Pantalets*" and "*Turkish Trowsers*": *Designing Freedom in the Mid-Nineteenth-Century United States*, Gayle V. Fischer (1997) explores the first attempts made by a few women fashion reformers to introduce bifurcated (divided) pants intended for use under skirts. In the mid-1800s in the USA, mainstream men and women who felt this was an infringement on the accepted moral standards of society met these attempts with fierce antagonism. Keep in mind that we are not talking about women wearing trousers *alone* as is common today; the women fashion reformers desired to introduce trousers as something to be worn *underneath* skirts, which were shorter than the mainstream ankle-length types. However, the strongest objection seemed to be that the drawers resembled boys' trousers and that mothers did not want to dress their daughters "like a parcel of boys." (Fischer, 1997, p. 118).

Perhaps most revealing is that many women interviewed admitted that Hollywood film stars had the biggest impact on their decision to wear trousers. Significantly, two prominent film stars mentioned by these respondents, Louise Brooks and Marlene Dietrich, had cultivated lesbian relationships. Brooks admitted to a one-night affair with Grete Garbo. Marlene Dietrich, named the ninth greatest female star of all time by the American Film Institute, was bisexual. She is often photographed wearing trousers and other male attire giving her an androgynous look. One of the women interviewed by Katina Bill said that she bought her trousers to emulate Marlene Dietrich.

There is a simple reason why we have Deuteronomy 22:5: God as the Creator is of the opinion that just as men and women were created with distinct anatomical shapes, He wants clothing to reflect that natural difference. To argue otherwise is to presume that one knows better than the One who shaped our bodies out of the dust, breathed life into us, and even clothed our first parents when they were clumsily-clad with a few fig leaves.

Our concern, as Christians, should be to interrogate the deliberate attempts to blur and expunge any semblance of distinctions between male and female apparel. The vociferous demands to wear men's clothes strikes one as odd given that no man – at least in the last century - sought to wear female clothing publicly. What would women say if they came to work tomorrow and found their male colleagues all dressed up in skirts? Sometime ago, the English soccer star and fashion icon, David Beckham, wore a sarong which is basically a tube-like fabric tied around the waist and similar to a skirt. Heads shook in disbelief and Beckham was severely ridiculed by the self-appointed “fashion-police”. He quickly discarded the sarong.

***1Peter 3:3** Whose adorning let it not be that outward adorning of plaiting the hair, and of wearing of gold, or of putting on of apparel;*

***1Peter 3:4** But let it be the hidden man of the heart, in that which is not corruptible, even the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit, which is in the sight of God of great price.*

It is commonplace to hear some say that God looks at the heart. This, of course, is true but keep in mind that man cannot see the heart – only the outside. Contrary to the prevailing conventions of this world, what we choose to wear is noticed in the spiritual realms too. “That the sons of God saw the daughters of men that they were fair; and they took them wives of all which they chose” (Genesis 6:2). In another intriguing verse, which appears to support the above, the apostle Paul exhorts women to have “power” on their heads because the angels are watching:

***1Corinthians 11:10** For this cause ought the woman to have power on her head because of the angels.*

Paul teaches that a woman must have uncut hair because the hair is given to her as a covering signifying her submission to the order ordained by God – the husband is the head of the wife. Failure to acknowledge and submit to this truth offends the holy angels of God and makes her vulnerable to the influence of fallen angels – demons. This should serve as a powerful motivation for men and women alike to embrace and cultivate Biblical holiness.

***Ephesians 5:32** This is a great mystery: but I speak concerning Christ and the church.*

The distinction between male and female is not one based solely on anatomical and other visible differences, but is intended to epitomize the relationship between the Lord and the Church. Thus the terms “male” and “female” take on a fundamentally different significance than we normally attach to them. Applying this wonderful symbolism to

Deuteronomy 22:5 leaves us with a new appreciation of the need for distinction in dress. In Biblical imagery, the condition of being “male” is to be understood as representative of Christ Himself, whereas “female” portrays the church of Christ – His bride. “But I would have you know, that the head of every man is Christ; and the head of the woman is the man; and the head of Christ is God 1Corinthian 11:3. God has also ordained an order, a hierarchy of submission, if you will, in this order. It is, in fact, submission which characterizes the relationship, conferring spiritual legitimacy. God commands the sexes to abstain from wearing garments that do not pertain to their own sex because this would in effect be an assault on the spiritual symbolism behind maleness and femaleness.

It would be an attempt to erase the difference between Christ and the church – the two would no longer be distinguishable. The hierarchy and order of submission would also be jeopardized. The truth is that Christ has His own majestic garments which are different from that of the bride – His church. Even in our ultra-modern world, where, as we have seen in the case of the blue jeans which “levelled the sexes”, I have yet to see bridegrooms and their brides sharing the same outfit.