

How to Apply Deuteronomy 22:5

This study came out of a side-discussion that we had in our service regarding the matter of appropriate attire for Christian women. The format that I used for this study was to present how to study a text like this without any of the resources that I typically make use of. Sometimes there is a sense among those whom I teach that they could never discover what I do because of the helps that I use; in this case, most of what follows came through the use of dictionaries and Scriptures that we have looked at numerous times. To effectively study the Word of God is neither easy nor simple, and it will require that we expend some energy to accomplish the task (2 Timothy 2:15); nevertheless, it is our responsibility to do more than simply take a text of Scripture at “face value” (which really means to not study it within the context of the whole of God’s Word), and then build a doctrine on it. This is the text:

“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” (Deuteronomy 22:5)

This verse causes difficulties for some people, and, I fear, too often it becomes a matter of extracting a text of Scripture that supports a personal point of view. I heard one lady say that she feels that God wants her to wear dresses, and that’s perfectly fine, but, as I have carefully advised her, don’t base your decision on this text of Scripture. What’s more, wearing a dress does not make her more obedient to what God requires – in other words, there is no merit for doing so. How should we take this text?

David Cloud, an independent, fundamental Baptist, considers this text to present the “first principle” in what is appropriate for clothing.¹ “When I am trying to decide whether or not I should wear a certain thing, my first question is “Is that item worn by the opposite sex?” In other words, I as a man should not wear anything that a woman would wear.”² He then goes on to take Paul’s words that the experiences of the Israelites “are written for our admonition” as his basis for taking this text as his first principle in what is appropriate dress for a man and woman (1 Corinthians 10:11). Elsewhere he says, “This [referring specifically to Deuteronomy 22:5] contains a moral principle that there should be a distinction between the sexes **even in how they dress**” (emphasis added).³ He comes very close to having it right, but then slides into what, for him, is the cultural issue of dress.

How can we approach this verse so that we will come away with an understanding of what God’s purpose is? At first reading, we might say that cross-dressing is an abomination to the Lord. However, the Lord expects two things of us: 1) to have a deep, insatiable desire to understand His truth, and 2) we are to study His Word, as a whole, so that His Spirit will be able to guide us into His Truth. Therefore, we must consider this verse within the broader context of Scripture before we jump to conclusions that may not be accurate.

With a moment’s reflection we will realize that the clothing worn by the Israelites at the time that Moses received this instruction was very different from what we are used to in our western

¹ David Cloud, Dressing for the Lord, p. 29.

² Ibid.

³ <https://www.wayoflife.org/reports/the-law-and-the-new-testament-christian.php>

culture. It is generally accepted, and supported by historical records, that the typical dress of the day was basically the same for men and women: it was a tunic drawn together at the waist.⁴ There is some indication that the woman's tunic was longer than the man's, but, other than that, there was very little difference. Clearly, the prohibition of our passage must have much more to it than simply a man and a woman wearing each other's tunics.

This verse is found in Deuteronomy, which literally means second law⁵; it is found within this fifth Book of Moses, which is a detailed reiteration of the Laws that Moses received from Jehovah at Mt. Sinai. Even though this book is largely a repetition of what has already been stated in the other books of Moses, this verse is not found anywhere else in Scripture. Therefore, it is only prudent that we use caution to be sure that we understand exactly what the Lord is intending by this instruction.

In our study of Scripture, we have come upon something that might well have a bearing on our present study: "For he [Jesus] is our peace, who hath made both [the Jews and the Gentiles] one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition *between us*; Having abolished in his flesh the enmity, *even* the law of commandments *contained* in ordinances; for to make in himself of twain one new man, so making peace" (Ephesians 2:14-15). Jesus made it abundantly clear that He did not "come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil" (Matthew 5:17); He did not come to annihilate or remove the Law, but to live in obedience to the Law, and bring to fruition many of the prophetic themes of the Law. Jehovah promised Satan in the Garden of Eden that He would, through the offspring of the woman, bring about his destruction; a promise that continued to live until Jesus came and fulfilled it. However, Jesus said that He did not come to *destroy* the Law, and Paul tells the Ephesians that Jesus *abolished*, or brought to an end, the *law of commandments in ordinances*; we must reconcile these two seemingly contradictory statements before we can move on.

Jesus stated that His mission was to fulfill the Law, while Paul refers specifically to an *ordinance*, which is typically understood to be a specific regulation under a broader canopy of law⁶; perhaps within our culture we might look at these as being by-laws within a local government or company – laws that are designed particularly for a given community. If we take this concept back to the Laws that God gave to Moses, do we find an overarching Law with regulations under it that are meant to govern the lives of Israel? In fact, we do! The Decalogue, or the Ten Commandments, form an umbrella of Laws written by Jehovah upon two tables of stone (Exodus 31:18; Deuteronomy 4:13); this is completely unique to these Ten Laws, and these tables of stone were kept within the Holy of Holies, in the Ark of the Covenant, upon which was the very presence of God (Exodus 25:22; 26:33; 1 Kings 8:9). Clearly, the Ten Commandments were central to all that God required of Israel. However, their significance goes even further; the Lord told Jeremiah, "But this *shall be* the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; After those days, saith the LORD, **I will put my law in their inward parts**, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people" (Jeremiah 31:33). What *law* is this that God will write in the hearts under this new covenant? The only Law that this could be is the Law that God first wrote upon two tables of stone, which were kept by Israel within the Holy of Holies of the tabernacle in the presence of God. From this it becomes clear that the Ten Commandments of God are permanent; under the New Covenant that was implemented by Jesus

⁴ Ralph Gower, *The New Manners and Customs of Bible Times*, p. 10.

⁵ <http://www.dictionary.com/browse/deuteronomy>

⁶ <http://www.dictionary.com/browse/ordinance?s=t>

with His disciples (Luke 22:20), these Laws (all ten of them) are now written upon our hearts when we place our faith in the Lord Jesus Christ for salvation.

With this firmly in mind, as we come back to Paul's declaration (through the Spirit) that Jesus abolished the *commandments in ordinances*, we can see that this must refer to the Mosaic Laws that governed every aspect of the Israelites' lives – something that is totally different and separate from God's Law of the Ten Commandments. Jesus fulfilled the Mosaic Laws, thereby rendering them to be of no effect to those who are under the New Covenant. We are not condemned if we are *in Christ* (which means living according to the leading of the Spirit of God), and, through this unique relationship, we can live out the *righteousness of the law* (Romans 8:1-4); not the Mosaic Law that has been ended in Christ, but the Law of God (His Ten Commandments) upon which hangs everything else that God has prepared to guide us (Matthew 22:36-40; Ephesians 2:10).

As we return to the verse that began our meditation on God's Word, we recognize that this is one of the numerous Mosaic Laws, the ordinances that have been ended at the cross of Christ (Colossians 2:14). This changes the tenor of this command entirely; however, it does say that these two actions (a man wearing woman's clothing, and a woman, a man's) are an *abomination unto the LORD thy God*. Very clearly, there must be much more to this to make it something that is described as being disgusting to the Lord.

As we ponder this deeper question, we recall Genesis 1:27 – “So God created man in his *own* image, in the image of God created he him; **male and female created he them.**” God created both the man and the woman in His image, and, as such, they each bear a unique role within His program for mankind. Could this have a bearing on our text?

God made the man and the woman for each other (Genesis 2:18), and emphasized that unique relationship: “Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh” (Genesis 2:24). After the fall into sin, God reinforced the roles for the man and the woman within the marriage relationship: 1) the man would have to labor in order to provide food for them (Genesis 3:19), and 2) the woman was placed under the authority of the man (Genesis 3:16). Even though this might well stand in opposition to modern thinking, it is, nevertheless, what God ordained while Adam and Eve were still in the Garden of Eden. We know that God does not change (Malachi 3:6; Hebrews 13:8), but has He changed this?

In his letter to the Ephesians, Paul wrote, “Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church ... Therefore as the church is subject unto Christ, so *let* the wives *be* to their own husbands in every thing. Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it ...” (Ephesians 5:22-24). Here is a reiteration of the Genesis-roles of the man and woman in marriage, as well as some additional information: the woman is to submit to the man, and the man is to love the woman even as Christ loves the *church*. Paul is likening the marriage relationship between the husband and wife to what exists between the Lord Jesus Christ and the *church* (those who are His through faith). The union of a man and a woman to become *one flesh* is a *great mystery*, but, writes Paul, “I speak concerning Christ and the church” (Ephesians 5:31-32). Therefore, the foundation for the roles of a man and woman in marriage does not come from social norms, or even our traditions; the marriage bond is patterned after the relationship that Christ has with those who have placed their faith in Him for salvation. There can be no question that the roles for marriage, which God established in the Garden, have not changed.

Therefore, as we look at the verse in question, we must keep in mind that God has created the man and the woman for particular roles in life. We've very briefly considered the roles within marriage, and seen how they are clearly defined, but do these roles extend beyond marriage in some form?

Paul's instruction to Timothy regarding women in the assembly of the faithful is this: "... women [are to] adorn themselves in modest apparel, with shamefacedness and sobriety; not with broided hair, or gold, or pearls, or costly array; But (which becometh women professing godliness) with good works. Let the woman learn in silence with all subjection. But I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence" (1 Timothy 2:9-12). Women (married or single) are to dress modestly, and not with extravagance or with a flashy display of wealth and prestige; beyond that they are to learn of spiritual matters in submissive *silence*,⁷ and are not to hold authority over men. This Biblical instruction has certainly suffered today; nevertheless, it stands in keeping with God's order from the beginning.

If we take what we have looked at so far, and return to the original text, we can see that God's desire is that men and women function within the roles for which they have been created. To depart from them is an abomination to the Lord; He created male and female, and it is His will that they live according to their respective roles. As we take the time to carefully study God's Word, we can understand that the *abomination* to the Lord really has nothing to do with the matter of clothing. I have taken this approach to the text in order to demonstrate that we do not need a lot of Bible study tools on hand in order to carefully examine a text of Scripture, and to access God's truth thereby.

Now let's consider the text using some additional helps.

The woman shall not wear that which pertaineth unto a man – literally, *not to be the garment of a strong man upon a woman*.⁸ The word for *that which pertaineth* is a Hebrew word that primarily speaks of an article, object or thing.⁹ *Man*, in this case, refers to a *strong* man (as opposed to women, children and non-combatants); this is someone who is charged with providing protection – within our modern terms this would be a soldier, policeman, guard, etc.¹⁰ Therefore, we must understand this to refer to all that a military man would wear, which could include a special tunic, armor, and weaponry. *Man* is from the Hebrew word *geber*, which carries the thought of might; if this was just an ordinary *man*, then the word would be *iysh* (which refers specifically to a male human being) or *adam* (a term generally applied to mankind, but occasionally used to differentiate a man from a woman [*ishshaw*]).¹¹

Within the Mosaic Law, a woman was not to be involved in providing protection for the children of Israel – that was specifically reserved for men. As we have already discerned, the Lord is ensuring that the children of Israel understand that there are differing roles for men and women

⁷ *Silence* here means quietness, respecting the orderly atmosphere that is to characterize the assembly of saints (1 Corinthians 14:40); this in no way removes the responsibility of the woman to test all things against the Scriptures in order to ensure that the teacher is opening God's Word accurately (1 John 4:1; Hebrews 13:17). The latter requires that women come to truly understand the Scriptures.

⁸ Leningrad Hebrew OT.

⁹ BDB.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ BDB; Strong's Online.

within society, and this regulation was imposed to help define the role of the woman within the Israelite community, which was to reflect God's desire for mankind. Notice that for a woman to wear the outfit of a military man is an *abomination* (*tow'ebah*, a disgusting thing) to the Lord, and it is so because she has stepped beyond what the Lord intends for a woman.¹²

neither shall a man put on a woman's garment: A mighty man (*geber*) shall not be clothed in women's garments. In this case, the man, who bears the responsibility of protecting the community, who has been commissioned to wear a military outfit befitting his position, must not try to avoid his responsibilities by donning the garments of a woman. Even here, God is clarifying the roles for men and women; keep in mind that there was not much difference between the garments worn by the average man and woman of this day.

for all that do so are abomination unto the LORD thy God – to do these is a disgusting thing to Jehovah Elohiym. The described actions are twofold: 1) for a woman to wear a military outfit, and 2) for a military man to wear women's clothing. The abomination to the Lord is the rejection of the roles for which He prepared the man and the woman whom He created in His image. As our Creator, he has an intimate knowledge of that for which we have been designed, and a far superior understanding of His purposes for us, as men and women. It is a disgusting thing (an *abomination*) to Him when we choose to ignore what His Word tells us concerning our designated roles in life.

As we have looked at this verse, it has become evident that we can discern the Lord's mind in this matter without any specialized tools. As we study the Word of God, three things are fundamentally important for us: 1) we must not come to the Scriptures to find support for our traditions, or to find justification for our actions; 2) we must have a love for the Truth of God (that is, His Word, and the Lord Jesus Christ) so that we desire it with all of our hearts, for without such a love we will not even attain salvation (2 Thessalonians 2:10); 3) we must come with a willing heart to change how we live in accordance with what the Spirit of God will reveal to us. We must be faithful doers of the will of God in order to receive His "well done."

¹² Strong's Online.