

Pleasing God – Gender-distinct Clothing

- 1) The purpose of the Christian life is to be pleasing to God. This desire flows out of a proper fear of the Lord.
 - A) “So whether we are at home or away, we make it our aim to please him” (2 Cor 5:9, ESV).¹
- 2) Our desire to please God affects every area of our lives, even the mundane and habitual aspects of daily life (like eating and drinking).
 - A) “So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God” (1 Cor 10:31).
 - B) “And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him” (Col 3:17).
- 3) One such area of life, and the main focus of this study, is our clothing. God’s Word reveals that He wants us to wear gender-distinct clothing.
 - A) “A woman shall not wear a man’s garment, nor shall a man put on a woman’s cloak, for whoever does these things is an abomination to the LORD your God” (Deut 22:5).
- 4) The Mosaic Law and the NT Believer.
 - A) The verse given above is from the book of Deuteronomy. Deuteronomy is one of the five books comprising the Pentateuch. It consists of Moses’ last three sermons and two prophetic poems about Israel’s future. In this book, Moses urged Israel to remain faithful and obedient to the covenant laws given at Mt. Sinai some 40 years earlier. The central section of Deuteronomy (12:1–26:19) recounts these laws. The stipulations are wide-ranging, touching all areas of life: economics, family and sexual relationships, religious observance, leadership, justice, guidance, food, property, and warfare. These laws showed Israel how to keep the great command (the Shema) of Deuteronomy, “Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might” (6:4–5).²
 - B) The Mosaic Covenant played a temporary role in the history of the nation of Israel (Gal 3:19–25).
 - (1) It had many positive aspects: a) it exposed the sinfulness of man, b) it served to

¹ Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from The Holy Bible, English Standard Version® (ESV®), copyright © 2001 by Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

² *The ESV Study Bible*, “Introduction to Deuteronomy,” Crossway, 2007.

- restrain men from evil, c) it revealed the holiness of Yahweh, d) it formed the basis of Israel's walk with and worship of Yahweh, e) it unified and distinguished Israel as a nation-state, f) it served as a evangelistic message to the surrounding pagan nations, and g) it anticipated and prefigured the ministry of Jesus Christ and the New Covenant.
- (2) But it also had weaknesses: a) it could not cleanse from sin or grant spiritual life to those who kept it (Gal 3:21–24), b) it operated on the principle of observance, not faith (Gal 3:11–12), c) it established a human priestly line which was subject to physical death (Heb 7:23–24), and d) it was tailored for a certain people in a certain area of land under specific agricultural and political circumstances.
- C) Jeremiah, the OT prophet who preached to the sinful kingdom of Judah, prophesied of a coming day when Yahweh would make a new covenant with Israel (Jer 31:31–34; cf. Heb 8:8–12). The author of Hebrews tells us that this prophecy meant that the first covenant, the Mosaic Covenant, was in the process of being superseded—it was growing old (nearing the end of its intended lifespan) and ready to vanish away (a shadow that disappears as the true form is revealed).
- D) As believers, we participated spiritually in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, the inaugurator of the New Covenant (Rom 6:3–5). When we died spiritually with Christ, we died to the law. Galatians 2:19–20a says, “For through the law I died to the law, so that I might live to God. I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me.” Romans 7:1, 4 says, “Or do you not know, brothers—for I am speaking to those who know the law—that the law is binding on a person only as long as he lives. Likewise, my brothers, you also have died to the law through the body of Christ, so that you may belong to another, to him who has been raised from the dead, in order that we may bear fruit for God.” Practically speaking, this means that we are not bound by or under the Mosaic Covenant.
- E) Does this mean that we as believers have no boundaries for our behavior? Are we free to do as we please? Certainly not! The apostle Paul addressed this issue in 1 Corinthians 9:20–21: “To the Jews I became as a Jew, in order to win Jews. To those under the law I became as one under the law (though not being myself under the law) that I might win those under the law. To those outside the law I became as one outside the law (not being outside the law of God but under the law of Christ) that I might win those outside the law.” Paul states that there is a law that applies to NT believers and that law is the law of Christ.
- F) What is the law of Christ?³ The only other place this phrase is used in the NT is Galatians 6:2 which says, “Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ.” While this verse does emphasize loving others as essential to fulfilling the law of Christ, it doesn't

³ See Paul R. Schmidtbleicher, “Law in the New Testament,” *Chafer Theological Seminary Journal* 9 (Fall 2003): 50–78 and Todd A. Wilson, “The Law of Christ and the Law of Moses: Reflections on a Recent Trend in Interpretation,” *Currents in Biblical Research* 5.1 (2006): 123–144.

give us much detail. What other clues do we have? Consider John 14:15, “If you love me, you will keep my commandments,” and Matthew 28:18–20, “And Jesus came and said to them, ‘All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.’” As disciples of Christ, we have commands that our Master has given us to follow. Jesus tells us that if we love Him, we will keep His commands.

- G) What are Christ’s commandments? Rather than going through the gospels and compiling a list of all the commands of Christ⁴, I want to call our attention to Matthew 22:37–40. Jesus was talking to a lawyer of the Pharisees about which commandment of the law was the greatest. “And he [Jesus] said to him, ‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets.’” Also consider John 13:34: “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another.” These passages teach us that the law of Christ is a law of love. Jesus commanded us to love God and love our neighbor (saved and sinner alike). These two commands sum up the entirety of what Christ expects of us as believers. The life of the believer is a life of great freedom and liberty, and God wants us to live responsibly within that liberty (Gal 5:13).⁵
- H) Inevitably the following questions are asked: “How do I love God? How do I love my neighbor? How do I know what pleases and displeases God?” If someone asked you these questions, you would probably encourage them to read God’s Word—it will tell you how to love God and others. But it doesn’t take long in reading the NT to discover that we are told to obey laws taken directly from the Mosaic Covenant:
- (1) Jesus: “You know the commandments: ‘Do not commit adultery, Do not murder, Do not steal, Do not bear false witness, Honor your father and mother’” (Luke 18:20).
 - (2) James: “For whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become accountable for all of it. For he who said, ‘Do not commit adultery,’ also said, ‘Do not murder.’ If you do not commit adultery but do murder, you have become a transgressor of the law” (James 2:10–11).
 - (3) Paul: “Honor your father and mother (this is the first commandment with a promise), that it may go well with you and that you may live long in the land” (Eph 6:2–3).

⁴ See the *Commands of Christ* series produced by the Institute in Basic Life Principles at <<http://www.iblp.org>>.

⁵ For an excellent defense of the notion of an “eternal law of God,” see Paul R. Schmidtbleicher, “Law in the New Testament,” *Chafer Theological Seminary Journal* 8 (July–September 2002): 39–63.

- I) How do we explain these references to the Mosaic Law? The answer to this question has already been hinted at in one of the Scriptures we looked at previously:
- (1) Jesus said about loving God and loving others: “On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets” (Matt 22:40).
 - (2) Jesus said about loving others: “So whatever you wish that others would do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets” (Matt 7:12).
 - (3) Paul said about loving others: “For the whole law is fulfilled in one word: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself’” (Gal 5:14, quoting Lev 19:18).
 - (4) Paul said about loving others: “For the commandments, ‘You shall not commit adultery, You shall not murder, You shall not steal, You shall not covet,’ and any other commandment, are summed up in this word: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfilling of the law” (Rom 13:9–10).
 - (5) James said about loving others: “If you really fulfill the royal law according to the Scripture, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself,’ you are doing well (James 2:8).
- J) These verses reveal that there is a connection (a continuity) between the Mosaic Law and the law of Christ. What is the nature of this connection? I suggest that everything in the Mosaic Law (indeed, everything in the entire OT) is intended to: 1) express the *unchanging character of God* and 2) teach us *how to love God and love others* (cf. 2 Tim 3:16–17).
- K) In Malachi 3:6 God says, “I am Yahweh, I do not change.” Notice that God invokes His name. In the OT, a person’s name was representative of their character—God is telling us that who is He, His essential nature, never changes. God’s character is the foundation of the two universal principles which govern human behavior: love God and love others (the law of Christ). God communicated these principles in the Mosaic Law (Deut 6:5; Lev 19:18), and He gave many specific applications of how to put these principles into practice. Here is the paradigm that I believe we should apply as we read the Mosaic Law (and the OT in general): *This text is expressing God’s unchanging character and is teaching me how to love God and love others.* That is why the NT quotes direct statements of the Mosaic Law as normative for us today. They are expressions of God’s unchanging character and instruct us on how to love God and love others.⁶

⁶ This approach is similar to “principlism” as discussed in J. Daniel Hays, “Applying the Old Testament Law Today,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 158 (Jan–Mar 2001): 21–35. See also the excellent articles by David A. Dorsey, “The Law of Moses and the Christian: A Compromise,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 34/3 (Sept 1991): 321–334; “The Use of the OT Law in the Christian Life: A Theocentric Approach,” *Evangelical Journal* 17/1 (1999): 1–18; Paul R. Schmidtbleicher, “Balancing the Use of the Old Testament,” *Chafer Theological Seminary Journal* 8 (July–September 2002): 39–62; “Law in the New Testament,” *Chafer Theological Seminary Journal* 9 (Fall 2003): 50–78. See also Roy B. Zuck, *Basic Biblical Interpretation* (Wheaton, IL: Victor, 1991): 286–89; Goldingay, *Models for Interpretation of Scripture*, 92; and Robert Chisholm, *From Exegesis to Exposition: A Practical Guide to Using*

- L) Let's put this paradigm into practical use by returning to Deuteronomy 22:1–4 and asking ourselves, *What does this passage reveal about God's character, and what does it teach me about how to love God and love others?* God cares about how we treat each other, including how we treat our neighbor's private property. God wants us to love each other. If I love my neighbor I will: a) not ignore the potential loss or destruction of his private property, b) go out of my way to return his lost property, c) care for his lost property if I can't immediately return it, and d) not ignore my neighbor when he's struggling with his vehicle (donkey) or his tractor/truck (ox). Isn't it amazing how much detail on how to love others is contained right here in these few verse?
- M) Let's skip over our main verse (v.5) and put our paradigm to work on 22:6–7. Again, *What does this passage reveal about God's character, and what does it teach me about how to love God and love others?* God cares about His creation and I should as well. If I love God I will be a wise steward of the created order that He has given us. If I love my neighbor I will not mismanage the natural resources that I share with him. If I did, it would result in hardship and deprivation for others.
- N) Let's continue on to 22:8. In those days the roof of a home was used for storing grain, as a sleeping area in summer and as a place to socialize with friends. Because of this, a fence or barrier was needed to keep people from accidentally falling off the roof. Obviously, our modern homes are not built this way, and this verse seems to have little relevance to us. But, let's apply our paradigm, *What does this passage reveal about God's character and what does it teach me about how to love God and love others?* God cares about how my private property affects others. If I love my neighbor I will: a) be concerned about his safety, b) go out of my way to protect him when he is on or near my private property, and c) ensure my property is designed with the safety of others in mind.
- O) We are now ready to return to our main verse, Deuteronomy 22:5. But before we apply our paradigm, we need to spend some time in the details of this verse, making sure that we truly understand what it is saying.

Biblical Hebrew (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998): 223–24, 255. Christopher Wright, *An Eye for an Eye: The Place of Old Testament Ethics Today*, uses the term “paradigmatic” instead of “principlism,” but he describes the same basic approach (pp. 162–63). William Klein, Craig Blomberg, and Robert Hubbard Jr. cite Wright and state that the Law serves as “a paradigm of timeless ethical, moral, and theological principles,” and that the interpreter therefore must strive to “discover the timeless truth beneath its cultural husk” (*Introduction to Biblical Interpretation* [Dallas: Word, 1993], 279). A similar view is taken by Wenham, *The Book of Leviticus*, 33–35; and John E. Hartley, *Leviticus*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, 1992), lxxiii.

5) Deuteronomy 22:5 – Translation.

- A) Man (*geber*) – The word used for “man” in the phrase “a man’s garment” (ESV) is *geber*, and its normal meaning is “man.”⁷ Some have claimed that this word refers to a male warrior.⁸ However, there is nothing in the verse or the context to justify this understanding.⁹ The word for a male warrior is *gibbor*.¹⁰ The words *geber* and *gibbor* have the same Hebrew root, but they are not interchangeable or synonymous. None of the Hebrew lexicons define *geber* as meaning a male warrior.¹¹ All our English versions translate *geber* as “man” and not as “male warrior.”¹² Further, the contrast in the verse between men’s clothing and women’s clothing signals that this is a contrast of genders.
- B) Garment (*keli*) – The word used for “garment” in the phrase “a man’s garment” (ESV) is *keli*, and its normal meaning is “article” or “item.”¹³ Because of this, some have suggested that the word refers to weapons.¹⁴ However, there is nothing in the verse or the context to justify this understanding. The word *keli* is a general term whose meaning depends on the context in which it is used.¹⁵ In this context, *keli* is used in parallel with the word *simlat* in the phrase “a woman’s cloak” (ESV). Thus the verse puts *keli* in the context of clothing, not of weapons.¹⁶ Our English versions translate *keli* as follows: “clothing,” (BBE, NAS, NET, NIV, NLT) “clothes,” (NIRV) “apparel,” (NRS) “garment,” (ESV) “that which pertains to a man,” (KJV, RSV) and “article proper to a man” (NAB). Perhaps the best blend of these might be, “article of clothing.”
- C) Cloak (*simlat*) – The word used for “cloak” in the phrase “a woman’s cloak” (ESV) is

⁷ See Ludwig Koehler and Walter Baumgartner, *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*, (Leiden: Brill, 2001): 175–76. Hereafter *HALOT*. Francis Brown, S. R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs, *The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1907): 149. Hereafter *BDB*. William L. Holladay, *A Concise Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971): 55. Hereafter *Holladay*. R. L. Harris, Gleason L. Archer and Bruce Waltke, *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1980): 310a. Hereafter *TWOT*.

⁸ Adam Clarke, “Notes on Deuteronomy,” *The Adam Clarke Commentary*. As accessed from <http://studylight.org>. See also C. M. Carmichael, *The Laws of Deuteronomy*, p. 147ff.

⁹ P. J. Harland, “Menswear and Womenswear: A Study of Deuteronomy 22:5,” *The Expository Times*, Vol. 110 Issue 3, Dec. 1998, p. 75. Harland gives a cogent argument for understanding Deuteronomy 22:5 in light of inappropriate mixtures (e.g. sowing a vineyard with two types of seed, plowing with donkey and ox, mixing wool and linen).

¹⁰ *HALOT*, p. 172; *BDB*, p. 150; *Holladay*, p. 54; *TWOT*, p. 310b.

¹¹ See *HALOT*, *BDB*, *Holladay*, *TWOT*.

¹² Compare the following versions: ESV, NAS, NET, NAB, NIRV, NIV, KJV, NLT, NRS, YLT.

¹³ *HALOT*, p. 478–79, *BDB*, p. 479, *Holladay*, p. 159; *TWOT*, p. 982g.

¹⁴ Cyrus H. Gordon, “A Note on the Tenth Commandment,” *The Journal of Bible and Religion* Vol. 31, No. 3, July 1964, pp. 208–9.

¹⁵ Examples of where *keli* is translated as “weapons”: Deut. 1:41; Jdg. 18:11; 1 Sam. 8:12; 17:54; 20:40; 21:8.

¹⁶ Robert G. Bratcher and Howard A. Hatton, *A Handbook on Deuteronomy*, p. 365.

símlat, and its normal meaning is “wrapper” or “mantle.”¹⁷ The word is used consistently in the OT to refer to an article of clothing.¹⁸

D) We conclude that our English versions have accurately captured the meaning of the original Hebrew. The three basic concepts in the verse are: 1) Women should not wear men’s clothing, 2) Men should not wear women’s clothing, 3) Anyone who does is an abomination to Yahweh.

6) Deuteronomy 22:5 – Original Meaning and Interpretation.

A) Commentators have attempted to discern if a specific cultural issue prevalent at the time was behind this prohibition. The two most common suggestions are: 1) pagan religious practices (e.g., crossing-dressing as part of an idolatrous rite)¹⁹, and 2) improper behavior within the military (e.g., women going to war).²⁰ However, both suggestions are speculation. The language of the verse is generic, and the text does not give any indication that a specific cultural issue was in view.²¹ Thus we understand the verse to be communicating these three basic concepts: 1) Women should not wear men’s clothing, 2) Men should not wear women’s clothing, 3) Anyone who does is an abomination to Yahweh.

7) Deuteronomy 22:5 – Personal Application.

A) Now that we have examined this verse in detail, let’s apply our paradigm: *What does this passage reveal about God’s character and what does it teach me about how to love God and love others?*

B) God’s Character.²²

(1) God created man in His own image and after His own likeness (Gen 1:26–27). He then took a rib from the man and formed the woman (Gen 2:21–23). This means that: 1) both men and women are made in the image and likeness of God, 2) men

¹⁷ HALOT, p. 1337–38; BDB, p. 971; Holladay, p. 353; TWOT, p. 2270a.

¹⁸ TWOT, p. 2270b.

¹⁹ Walter R. Roehrs and Martin H. Franzmann, *Concordia Self-Study Commentary*, p. 134; Christopher Wright, *New International Biblical Commentary: Deuteronomy*, p. 240–1; Raymond Brown, *The Bible Speaks Today: Deuteronomy*, p. 213; Daniel C. Whedon, “Deuteronomy,” *Commentary on the Old Testament*, Vol. 2, p. 489.

²⁰ C. M. Carmichael, *The Laws of Deuteronomy*, p. 147ff; also Gordon, pp. 208–209.

²¹ Harland, p. 74–75.

²² A. Philip Brown II, “Gender-Distinct Clothing, Part 1,” *God’s Revivalist and Bible Advocate*, Vol. 123 No. 6, September 2011; “Gender-Distinct Clothing, Part 2,” *God’s Revivalist and Bible Advocate*, Vol. 123 No. 7, October 2011. Articles may be accessed at <<http://www.godsrevivalist.com/>>.

and women are separate and distinct from the rest of creation,²³ 3) men and women are distinct from each other, 4) even in the unity of marriage, the gender and personalities of men and women remain distinct (*reflecting physically what is true spiritually within the Trinity*).

- (2) God designed both men and women to reflect His character. But neither gender reflects all aspects of God's image to the same degree. God designed women to be the primary image-bearers of His tenderness, compassion, and mothering love (Deut 32:18; Isa 42:13–14; 49:15; 66:12–13; Luke 13:34). Men, on the other hand, are the primary image-bearers of God's power, authority and fatherhood (Deut 1:31; Ps 10:16; Isa 10:13; 42:13; Zeph 3:17).²⁴
- (3) God's choice to make men and women the primary bearers of different aspects of His character provides a theological explanation for His concern that gender distinctions be maintained. When we blur God-designed gender distinctions, His image in us is blurred—whether it is in sex (contra-homosexuality; Lev 20:13), in marital roles (1 Cor 11:8–12; Eph 5:22–32), in the church (1 Cor 11:3–7; 14:34–35; 1 Tim 2:11–14), in built-in physical characteristics (hair length; 1 Cor 11:14–15), or in social conventions (dress distinctions; Deut 22:5). Maintaining a distinction between the genders is about reflecting the image and character of our triune God as He designed it to be reflected.
- (4) God is serious about the command He gives in Deuteronomy 22:5. He says that wearing the clothing of the opposite gender is an “abomination.” An “abomination” is something that is particularly detestable to God. In addition to Deuteronomy 22:5, God calls the following items or practices an abomination in Deuteronomy: graven images (7:25), idolatry (13:14), eating unclean animals (14:3), sacrificing blemished animals (17:1), child sacrifice, witchcraft, astrology and spiritism (18:9, 12), giving to God money obtained through prostitution (23:18); remarrying a woman you divorced after she has been remarried (24:4), and dishonesty in business (25:16).²⁵

C) Loving God and Loving Others.

- (1) The words “abomination” and “delight” are opposites in Scripture (cf. Prov 11:1, 20). When we love God, we delight in what He delights (Isa 58:13–14). Deuteronomy 22:5 tells us that loving God involves acknowledging and respecting the importance of maintaining a distinction between the genders in what we choose to wear. Loving

²³ We are *distinct* from the animals and should reject any attempt to transfer aspects of gender and sexuality that are true in the animal kingdom to human beings (e.g., spotted hyenas, discus fish, sea horses, tamarin monkeys, cuttlefish, etc.).

²⁴ The gender-specific descriptions found in Scripture are not accidental. God inspired the authors of the Bible to use gender-specific language when describing Himself. See Mike Stallard, “Gender-Neutral Translations: The Controversy Over the TNIV,” *Journal of Ministry & Theology* (Spring 2003): 5–26.

²⁵ This list demonstrates that the term “abomination” is not limited to aberrant sexual behavior and idolatry. A survey of “abomination” in the rest of the Bible confirms this conclusion (cf. Prov 6:16–19; 17:15; 28:9).

God means that we will not wear clothing that is specifically associated with the opposite gender.

(2) One way we love others is by living a consistent, godly life before them in the midst of the surrounding sinfulness of the world. Our testimony points people to God. Deuteronomy 22:5 tells us that loving others involves honoring and celebrating our gender by wearing gender-distinct clothing. This tells the world, “I am a man/woman—God made me this way and I want to reflect His image just as He intended a man/woman should.” When we do this, we help our society avoid the many negative impacts that result from gender confusion.

8) Deuteronomy 22:5 – Cultural Application.

A) Deuteronomy 22:5 is very general in what it prohibits. God did not give specific guidance on *how* we are to maintain visible distinctions between the genders in our clothing. Instead, God simply directs us to wear gender-distinct clothing—clothing that visibly distinguishes between the genders and is specific to each gender in our culture.

B) How did the Israelites obey this command? We don’t have enough data on the clothing worn by the Israelites to know the details of what distinguished the dress of one gender from the other.²⁶ However, the implication of the text is that there was a visible way of telling the difference between a man and a woman, and God expected the Israelites to obey this command by maintaining that distinction in their clothing.

C) How should we apply this principle today? I believe we should begin by examining the culture in which we currently live. If our culture has clothing that is gender-distinct, we should respect and preserve that distinction.²⁷ I recommend the tests outlined below as a method of determining how a culture differentiates between men and women in their clothing. To perform these tests, ask someone from the culture the following questions:

(1) Cross-dressing Test.

- Picture a man in woman’s clothing—what is the man wearing?
- Picture a woman in man’s clothing—what is the woman wearing?

(2) Mistaken Identity Test.

- If I want to avoid being mistaken for a man, what clothing should I wear?
- If I want to avoid being mistaken for a woman, what clothing should I wear?

²⁶ Our best data on the clothing of this time period comes from the relief sculptures on display in Room 10b of the British Museum which depict the capture of the city of Lachish in Judah in 701 BC. There is a scene in which Israelite captives are brought before Assyrian king Sennacherib and you can see their robe-like clothing.

²⁷ One important clarification—I am not advocating that we embrace all cultures’ clothing styles (e.g., imagine a hypothetical culture in which a bikini is the everyday clothing of choice for females). The clothing must pass the modesty principles discussed in the article “Pleasing God – Modesty.”

(3) Gender Affirmation Test.

- What clothing should my son wear if I want to affirm/encourage his masculinity?
- What clothing should my daughter wear if I want to affirm/encourage her femininity?

D) The answers to these questions will help us discern what actually constitutes gender-distinct clothing in the culture in which we live. What if we perform these tests on a culture, and that culture cannot give clear answers to the questions? If that happens, it is a good indication that something is wrong (gender confusion often results when a culture has rejected or is in the process of rejecting gender-distinct clothing). There is one final test that can be helpful in this situation:

(1) History Test.

- In the history of the culture, think of a time when men wore clothing that was distinct to their gender—what did they wear?
 - In the history of the culture, think of a time when women wore clothing that was distinct to their gender—what did they wear?
- E) It may be necessary in some cultures to return to a historic norm of gender-distinct clothing. What if even the history test fails on a particular culture? What should we do then? In that case, a good solution would be to borrow the clothing of another culture in which genders *are* clearly distinguished.
- F) Honoring the principle of gender-distinct clothing involves putting careful thought into determining what clothing is distinct to each gender in our culture and then doing all we can to preserve that distinction. We should celebrate gender differences and teach our children to do the same. Tell your sons/daughters, “God made you a man/woman and designed you to reflect certain aspects of His image. Wear clothing that clearly identifies you as a man/woman in your culture.”

9) Deuteronomy 22:5 – American Application.

- A) Let’s focus now on American culture. Prior to the 20th century, American culture was universally gender-distinct in its clothing: pants/trousers for men and dresses/skirts for women. However, over the past century there has been a fundamental change in what is considered acceptable clothing for women. Women now wear both dresses *and* pants. The vast majority of men, however, continue to wear only pants.²⁸

²⁸ I understand that there are exceptions to this general rule (in the fashion industry especially of late). But these exceptions do not represent the normal clothing of American men. Indeed, men dressed as women are the objects of ridicule and humor in modern media. For a recent example, see Charles Barkley’s commercial for Weight Watchers. Online, July 14, 2014 at <<http://espn.go.com/video/clip?id=espn:7750805>>.

- B) What answers would we get from Americans if we asked them the questions mentioned above? Even with the changes that have taken place in what is considered acceptable clothing for women, the answers given by Americans reveal that gender-distinct clothing is still pants/trousers for men and dresses/skirts for women.²⁹ As Americans, we have an obligation, in loving God and loving others, to wear clothing that is distinct to our gender, to promote gender-distinct clothing in our culture, and to resist changes in our culture that are in conflict with maintaining this biblical principle.

10) Deuteronomy 22:5 – When Cultures Change.

- A) A culture can be defined as the tangible outworking of the values and beliefs shared by a group of people.³⁰ All cultures change over time. Sometimes those changes are good (e.g., the abolition of slavery in England in 1833); sometimes those changes are bad (e.g., the legalization of abortion in American in 1973). The morality of a particular culture can be evaluated by comparing the values and beliefs of that culture to God’s Word. A close match indicates a healthy, moral society. Little or no correlation indicates a deteriorating, immoral society. As Christians, it is our duty to promote Godly values and beliefs, and to resist changes in our culture that are in conflict with God’s Word.
- B) Let’s consider cultural changes in the area of clothing. This is something we have experienced here in America, and is also being experienced in other western countries. As mentioned previously, over the past century there has been a fundamental change in what is considered acceptable clothing for women. Women now wear both dresses *and* pants, while the vast majority of men continue to wear only pants. As Christians, how are we to respond when a culture begins to change the definitions of gender-distinct clothing for men or women?
- C) I recommend the tests outlined below as a method for evaluating cultural changes in gender-distinct clothing. To perform these tests, ask the following questions:
- (1) Identity Test.
- Who is promoting this change?
 - What are their goals and motivations?
 - Whose material interests will be served by this change?

²⁹ Gayle V. Fischer, *Pantaloons and Power: A Nineteenth-Century Dress Reform in the United States*, p. 176. Any doubt of this can be answered by examining a typical restroom sign: the universal indicators of gender are long hair/skirts/dresses for women and short hair/pants/trousers for men.

³⁰ For an excellent discussion of thinking biblically about culture and society see *Everyday Theology: How to Read Cultural Texts and Interpret Trends*, edited by Kevin J. Vanhoozer, Charles A. Anderson and Michael J. Slesman.

(2) Direction Test.

- What direction will this change take our culture?
- In the future, if this change is taken beyond its current form, will we be closer or farther away from gender-distinct clothing?

(3) Message Test.

- What does this change intend to communicate to others?
- How do others interpret what this change is communicating?

(4) Theology Test.

- What worldview is associated with this change?
- Is this change in harmony with a life dedicated to loving God and loving others?

D) These tests help us evaluate cultural changes from a biblical perspective. If the sum total of the answers to these questions is doubtful or negative, then we have a good indication that the proposed cultural change will take us in the wrong direction.

E) In America, the change in gender-distinct clothing has been almost completely one-sided—women now wear clothing once worn only by men, but men do *not* wear clothing once worn only by women. This indicates that American culture has *not* sought to replace the historic norm (pants/trousers vs. dresses/skirts) with a new norm that honors the principle of gender-distinct clothing. Rather, women have appropriated men’s clothing as their own and stated that they are free to wear whatever they choose, regardless of historic cultural distinctions.³¹

F) In America, women have worn pants for many decades. They have also feminized the pants they wear—if a man wore them, most people would consider him to be wearing a woman’s clothes. This illustrates how complicated things get when a culture has blurred gender-distinctions in clothing. How should we deal with this? Does this mean that we have a new gender distinction that can be adopted by Christians? I believe that women’s feminization of the pants they wear does *not* constitute a true replacement of one gender-distinct norm for another. The vast majority of men still wear only pants, and women who wear pants still can/are mistaken for men. This is a good reason for us to retain the historic American norm for gender-distinct clothing and resist the cultural change that is moving us away from clear gender distinction in clothing.

³¹ A. Philip Brown II, “Gender-Distinct Clothing, Part 2.” *God’s Revivalist and Bible Advocate*, Vol. 123 No. 7, October 2011. Articles may be accessed at <<http://www.godsrevivalist.com/>>.

Appendix

A Brief History of Gender-distinct Clothing in America.

- 1) For most of our nation's history (1600–1900), men wore breeches/trousers and women wore dresses/skirts.¹ Then, in the 1840s and 50s, a new style was advocated by several women involved in the fledgling women's rights movement.² Inspired by those who criticized the current fashion of stiff corsets and long dresses, activists Elizabeth Miller, Elizabeth Stanton and Amelia Bloomer began appearing in public in shortened skirts worn over loose trousers.³ Amelia Bloomer recommended the outfit in *Lily*, the feminist journal she edited, and it became associated with her name. Reaction to "bloomers" was immediate and hostile; the mainstream press condemned it, as did the majority of both men and women.⁴ Clergymen preached against bloomers invoking the need to preserve the God-given distinction between the sexes through clothing.⁵ As a result, bloomers were quickly abandoned. Despite the publicity bloomers received, few women actually wore them and they never truly threatened established styles.⁶ However, bloomers did become a lasting symbol of the issue of women's rights.⁷
- 2) Then came the age of the bicycle. This simple vehicle transformed society. It provided a quick, easy form of transportation and offered unprecedented freedom for women. Huge numbers of women, supported by clubs and associations, took to the roads.⁸ One problem, however, quickly presented itself—it was difficult for women to ride a bicycle while wearing a long skirt. Various bicycle designs attempted to overcome this problem, but the length of the normal dress still made it difficult to pedal. Thus divided skirts were introduced. At first, they incorporated fullness and pleats to conceal the division. But by the 1890s, women often wore a bloomer-like outfit called "rationals" or "knickerbockers" for cycling.⁹ Though most people thought the outfit was unfeminine, it eventually became accepted.¹⁰ Women's rights activists took great interest in bicycling and were eager to take advantage of cycling

¹ Jo B. Paoletti, *Pink and Blue: Telling the Boys from the Girls in America*.

² Karen J. Kriebel, "From Bloomers to Flappers: The American Women's Dress Reform Movement, 1840–1920," (PhD dissertation, Ohio State University, 1998). See also Susan North, "From Neoclassicism to the Industrial Revolution: 1790–1860," *The Fashion Reader: Second Edition*, Edited by Linda Welters and Abby Lillethun, p. 65.

³ For an excellent resource on what these early founders of the women's rights movement actually thought and believed, see *Women Without Superstition "No Gods – No Masters": The Collected Writings of Women Freethinkers of the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries*, edited by Annie Laurie Gaylor.

⁴ *Ibid*, p. 66.

⁵ "Body Adornment and Clothing: Comparative History," *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Women in World History*, Bonnie G. Smith, Editor, p. 243.

⁶ Shelly Foote, "Challenging Gender Symbols," *Men and Women: Dressing the Part*, Edited by Claudia Kidwell and Valerie Steele, p. 151.

⁷ Susan J. Vincent, *The Anatomy of Fashion: Dressing the Body from the Renaissance to Today*, p. 124.

⁸ *Ibid*, p. 127.

⁹ *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Women in World History*, p. 243.

¹⁰ Alison Lurie, *The Language of Clothes*, p. 225.

outfits to resurrect their agenda for dress reform.¹¹

- 3) During the early 1900s, women's clothing began to change. This change coincided with the growing presence of women in the workforce. Although women still wore dresses, the new professional woman wore tailored jackets and neckties, articles previously worn only by men.¹² Then came the First World War. As men left for war in Europe, women were employed in the jobs they left behind. For many women the war was "a genuinely liberating experience" that made them feel useful as citizens and also gave them the freedom and the wages previously enjoyed only by men.¹³ After the First World War women's rights expanded—they won the right to vote in 1920, began working in a growing range of occupations, and their educational opportunities increased. Women were now a part of the previously 'masculine' areas of work and sports.¹⁴ Changes in women's clothing continued through the years leading up to the Second World War. Skirts became shorter, clothes became lighter and less restrictive, and trousers and shorts began to be adopted.¹⁵ During the 1930s, women like Marlene Dietrich and Katharine Hepburn promoted wearing trousers in their movies as a symbol of equality with men.¹⁶ However, trouser wearing was still the exception in women's clothing, and there was widespread criticism of the practice.¹⁷
- 4) The Second World War proved to be the watershed—the beginning of trousers as garments for everyday wear by women.¹⁸ As men left for active service in Europe and the Pacific, women took their jobs in factories across America. Convinced that workplace safety was being compromised by women's loose clothing, Boeing hired Muriel King to design pantsuits for their female employees. The designs were carried by Life Magazine and became popular in other workplaces.¹⁹ Inspirational wartime posters of Rosie the Riveter depicted her in bib overalls, and clothing stores quickly expanded their work-clothes departments to include women. In the postwar period of the 1950s, this experience helped

¹¹ Francis E. Willard, *A Wheel Within a Wheel*, 1895, p. 39. Francis makes the statement, "If they do this [change their dress] many prejudices as to what they may be allowed to wear will melt away...A reform often advances most rapidly by indirection."

¹² *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Women in World History*, p. 243.

¹³ Gail Braybon, *Women Workers in the First World War*.

¹⁴ Katina Bill, "Attitudes Towards Women's Trousers: Britain in the 1930s," *Journal of Design History* Vol. 6, No. 1 (1993), pp. 45-54.

¹⁵ The opening credits of the 1967 musical *Thoroughly Modern Minnie* starring Julie Andrews give an excellent visual synopsis of the changes in women's dress that were part of the 1920s. Online June 13, 2013 at <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KVNcLUE87HQ>>.

¹⁶ See the 1930 movie *Morocco* starring Marlene Dietrich and the 1938 movie *Bringing Up Baby* starring Katharine Hepburn.

¹⁷ *The Anatomy of Fashion*, p. 129.

¹⁸ Elizabeth Wilson and Lou Taylor, *Through the Looking Glass: A History of Dress from 1860 to the Present Day*, p. 113; Catherine Horwood, *Keeping up Appearances: Fashion and Class between the Wars*, p. 79.

¹⁹ Mike Lombardi and Todd Blecher, "Fashion Icon Rosie the Riveter" Boeing. Retrieved April 28, 2012, from <http://www.boeing.com/Features/2010/09/corp_rosie_09_20_10.html>.

to make jeans acceptable attire for women.²⁰

- 5) Then came the counterculture revolution of the 1960s. During this time, the younger generation rebelled against established authority structures. Wearing jeans became associated with feminism and women's rights in the same way that bloomers had in the nineteenth century. Wearing jeans was provocative, a way of breaking the boundaries of gender and class.²¹
- 6) During the 1970s, pants suits and slacks were worn to work, to parties, to the theater, in elegant restaurants and on international planes, by women of all ages.²² In 1970 the cutting-edge designer Rudi Gernreich predicted that by 1980, male and female dress would be interchangeable. Gernreich envisioned men and women in unisex or styles with their appearance differentiated by anatomy alone.²³
- 7) In the 1980s, women pursued corporate careers in increasing numbers. The male suit—including trousers— was adapted as a mode of "power dressing." Far from expressing a countercultural sensibility, women's trousers in this context expressed the desire to join the male establishment and to be taken seriously as business people.²⁴ In the 1990s major public figures (e.g., Hillary Clinton) introduced the pants suit into a setting where it was still seen as inappropriate: politics.²⁵
- 8) James Laver, the famous English fashion historian said, "Clothes are never a frivolity: they always mean something."²⁶ Designers know this and strive to make a statement with the clothing they produce. There is abundant evidence that the leaders of the fashion industry want to alter cultural norms of clothing and blur the distinctions between genders in dress.²⁷ American culture is in the process of *rejecting* gender-distinction in clothing as a value. Indeed, any effort to preserve such distinctions is mocked and considered archaic while the move toward unisex/androgynous clothing is considered progressive and fashionable.

²⁰ *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Women in World History*, p. 243.

²¹ *Ibid*, p. 243.

²² Alison Lurie, *The Language of Clothes*, p. 226.

²³ Jo B. Paoletti and Claudia Brush Kidwell, "Men and Women: Dressing the Part." *The Fashion Reader: Second Edition*, Edited by Linda Welters and Abby Lillethun, p. 203.

²⁴ *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Women in World History*, p. 243.

²⁵ Robin Givhan, "Hillary Clinton's Tentative Dip Into New Neckline Territory." *The Washington Post*. July 20, 2007. Retrieved April 19, 2012, from <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2007/07/19/AR2007071902668.html>

²⁶ James Laver, *Style in Costume*. (Oxford University Press. Oxford: 1949).

²⁷ Emily Pahler, "Abercrombie & Fitch: The Altering of Cultural Norms," 2009; R. Albert Mohler, "The Blur of Gender," 2009, accessed on July 11, 2014 at < <http://www.albertmohler.com/2009/11/20/the-blur-of-gender-is-the-new-york-times-trying-to-tell-us-something/> >; Ruth La Ferla, "It's All a Blur to Them," *The New York Times*, November 18, 2009, accessed on April 23, 2012 at <<http://www.nytimes.com/2009/11/19/fashion/19ANDROGYNY.html>>; Sarah Jensen & Louise B. Rasmussen, "Fe(-male) Fashion: A Feasibility Study of the Marketability of a Gender Neutral Fashion Brand," 2010.