

Understanding Deuteronomy 22:5

Why This Verse Is NOT About Pants

By Presiding Bishop Dwight Reed

There is great controversy regarding Deuteronomy 22:5, but the scripture is clear in its meaning. It is necessary to understand that neither one's Bishop nor Pastor possesses the authority to provide a personal interpretation of these texts. 2 Peter 1:20 says, "Knowing this first, that no prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation." Historically, the church has used much scripture out of context, leading many individuals to support or defend beliefs based on teachings from trusted leaders, regardless of their accuracy. Let me be clear, this is no disrespect to our fathers and mothers in the gospel who taught what they understood at the time. Nevertheless, we ought to be unwavering in our allegiance to the scripture itself, prioritizing it above any individual interpretation. We should not allow our respect for our leaders to overshadow our allegiance to the Word of God. I encourage all individuals to seek spiritual enlightenment in their engagement with scripture. Let us place the truth of the Word at the forefront of our understanding. I pray God give you spiritual revelation in all scripture.

The Verse:

*"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 KJV)*

This verse has been wrongly twisted to prohibit women from wearing pants. However, when we examine A Study of Deuteronomy 22:5, the Hebrew language, historical background, and ancient Near Eastern culture, we discover this passage has nothing to do with modern clothing like pants versus skirts. Instead, it addresses pagan religious practices and maintains the God-ordained distinction between male and female.

What This Verse Is Really About

1. The Word 'Pants' Never Appears in the Bible

- The word "pants" does not exist anywhere in Scripture (except Psalm 42:1, "As the deer pants for water" - a completely different meaning)
- Pants as we know them today didn't exist in ancient Israel.
- Using this verse to prohibit pants is reading modern clothing into an ancient text.

2. Both Men AND Women Wore Robes/Tunics

- Archaeological evidence shows both men and women in ancient Israel wore long tunics (robes)
- Men's tunics typically reached the knees for work or the ankles for formal occasions.
- Women's tunics were ankle-length, with additional fringe along the borders.
- Both wore outer garments (simlah/cloak) over the tunic.
- The difference was in decoration, the length of the fringe, and how garments were worn - NOT in pants vs. skirts.

3. The Hebrew Word 'Keli' Means More Than Clothing

- The Hebrew word translated "that which pertaineth" is 'keli geber' (כְּלִי-גִבּוֹר)
- 'Keli' means implements, articles, vessels, equipment, or armor - not just clothing.
- 'Geber' means a strong man, warrior, or mighty man - emphasizing masculine roles.
- This refers to items associated with male roles (like weapons, armor, or warrior gear), not modern fashion.

4. Context: Pagan Sexual Practices & Cultic Prostitution

Historical and archaeological evidence reveals that cross-dressing in ancient Near Eastern cultures was directly connected to homosexual and transgender practices in pagan worship:

- Male cult prostitutes (Hebrew: qadesh/qedeshim) served in Baal and Asherah temples, engaging in homosexual acts with male worshipers as part of fertility rituals.
- 2 Kings 23:7 explicitly states: 'He [King Josiah] tore down the quarters of the male cult prostitutes which were in the temple of the LORD, and where the women wove hangings for the Asherah.'
- These male prostitutes dressed as women and engaged in homosexual acts with male worshipers to invoke fertility from the gods.
- Theodore Burgh (Listening to the Artifacts) documents that in Mesopotamia, transvestite men dressed like women, played and performed in the cult of Ishtar, performing erotic dances and pantomime.
- Scholar Louis Crompton notes that cross-dressing was linked to homosexual temple prostitution throughout the ancient Near East.

- The assinnu (Assyrian male cult functionaries) prophesied while disguised and acting like a woman, perhaps resembling a present-day transvestite' (Abraham Malamat, The Mari Documents)
- In Cyprus, there was a 'bearded Venus' statue considered both male and female, to whom men dressed as women and women dressed as men offered sacrifice.
- The Galli (eunuch-priests of Cybele) paraded 'attired as women, soliciting the populace to unholy rites.'
- 2 Kings 10:22 confirms cult prostitutes wore special identifying garments: 'Bring out the vestments for all the worshipers of Baal.'
- Deuteronomy 23:17-18 prohibits both male (kadesh) and female (kedeshah) cult prostitutes, calling the male prostitute 'dog' - a term for homosexual prostitution.
- God was prohibiting Israel from participating in these sexual perversions disguised as worship.

5. The Word 'Abomination' Links to Sexual Perversion

- The Hebrew word 'to'evah' (abomination) appears throughout Scripture connected to both idolatry AND sexual sins.
- Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13 use 'to'evah' to describe homosexual acts: 'You shall not lie with a male as with a woman; it is an abomination.'
- The same word describes: incestual relations (Ezekiel 22:11), defiling a neighbor's wife (Ezekiel 33:26), and shrine prostitution (Deuteronomy 23:17-18)
- Scholars note that 'to'evah' is consistently used for 'detestable sins of a sexual nature' alongside idolatry.
- The term connects cross-dressing, cultic prostitution, and sexual perversion as closely linked practices.
- This language-based connection shows that Deuteronomy 22:5 addresses the same category of sexual sins as Leviticus 18 and 20
- The prohibition is fundamentally regarding safeguarding God's created sexual order - male and female, distinct and complementary

6. Deuteronomy 22 Is About Distinctions God Created

- The surrounding verses prohibit mixing different kinds of things God made separate:
- Verse 9: Don't plant two kinds of seeds in a vineyard
- Verse 10: Don't plow with an ox and donkey together
- Verse 11: Don't wear clothing of wool and linen mixed
- Verse 5 fits this pattern: Don't blur the distinction God established at creation between male and female.

8. The Real Issue: Gender Confusion and Sexual Identity

Deuteronomy 22:5 fundamentally addresses attempts to blur or erase the male-female distinction God established:

- In ancient times, men dressed as women to engage in homosexual cult prostitution.
- In modern times, transgender ideology that denies biological sex and God's created order
- The principle remains: God created male and female as distinct, complementary, and unchangeable (Genesis 1:27; 5:2)
- Attempting to portray oneself as the opposite sex contradicts God's creative design
- The passage prohibits: intentional gender confusion, transgender presentation, and cross-dressing for sexual purposes.
- The passage does NOT prohibit women from wearing modest pants that are clearly feminine in style.
- God's design: heterosexual marriage between one biological man and one biological woman (Genesis 2:24; Matthew 19:4-6)
- Sexual identity confusion was connected to pagan worship then, and remains spiritually dangerous now.

9. God Created Adam and Eve Naked - Then Clothed Them

- Genesis 3:21 says God made 'coats' (tunics/kethoneth) for both Adam and Eve.
- God didn't specify pants for Adam and skirts for Eve.
- The Bible never records God commanding different types of garments for men versus women.
- He clothed them modestly and appropriately - that's the principle.

10. Cultural Standards for Gender Distinction Vary

- Every culture throughout history has had ways to distinguish male and female dress.
- In ancient Israel, both wore robes, but in different styles.
- In Scotland, men wear kilts (skirt-like garments) and are clearly masculine.
- In many Asian cultures, both men and women traditionally wore robe-like garments.

- The principle is maintaining gender distinction, not specific garment types.

11. Women Can Wear Pants Without Looking Like Men

- Modern women's pants are designed specifically for female bodies.
- Women's pants differ from men's in cut, fit, styling, and decoration.
- A woman in women's pants is clearly identifiable as a woman.
- The verse prohibits deliberately trying to appear as the opposite sex, not wearing similar garments.

12. This Is a Ceremonial Law, Not Moral Law

- Deuteronomy 22 contains many ceremonial laws no longer binding on Christians:
- We don't follow verse 11 (no wool/linen mixtures) - we wear blended fabrics.
- We don't follow verse 12 (tassels on garments)
- Christ fulfilled the ceremonial law (Colossians 2:14-17)
- The moral principle remains: honor the male/female distinction God created

What IS the Real Issue?

Deuteronomy 22:5 is about:

- Rejecting pagan worship practices that involved ritual cross-dressing
- Protecting the God-ordained distinction between male and female
- Preserving Israel's identity as separate from idolatrous nations
- Honoring God's creative design: 'male and female He created them' (Genesis 1:27)

It is NOT about:

- Women wearing pants
- Modern fashion choices
- Specific styles of clothing

The Bottom Line

Using Deuteronomy 22:5 to prohibit women from wearing pants is a serious misinterpretation that:

- Ignores the Hebrew language and original meaning
- Disregards the historical background of pagan worship practices
- Overlooks how ancient Israelites actually dressed

- Imposes modern clothing categories onto an ancient text
- Creates legalistic burdens God never intended

The true principle is this: Dress modestly, appropriately for your gender as understood in your culture, and in a way that reveres God's design of male and female. This can be done whether wearing pants, skirts, robes, or any other modest clothing.

"For the LORD seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the LORD looketh on the heart." - 1 Samuel 16:7