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“The Function of Gender Roles”

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Deuteronomy 22:5

5 “A woman shall not wear anything that pertains to a man, nor shall a man put on a woman’s garment, for all who do so are an abomination to the LORD your God.

Thank you very much for coming to hear the message for today. Before we begin our next lesson, let us reiterate our reason for attending Church.

We attend Church to obtain the mind of Christ, meaning, to have the Bible illuminated in our minds so that we can clearly understand the principles that Jesus taught and base our daily personal decisions on those principles.

We come to Church because we want to be obedient to the Bible, which is the doctrine of Jesus Christ, in an informed, insightful and intelligent manner.

The passage of Scripture that I have chosen for a text today is one that caused controversy in my old church whenever it was quoted. I can remember when conventional wisdom dictated that women were Biblically required to wear dresses and hats in church because of **Deuteronomy 22:5**, along with **1Corinthians 11:4-7**, which says:

4 Every man praying or prophesying, having his head covered, dishonors his head.

5 But every woman who prays or prophesies with her head uncovered dishonors her head, for that is one and the same as if her head were shaved.

6 For if a woman is not covered, let her also be shorn. But if it is shameful for a woman to be shorn or shaved, let her be covered.

7 For a man indeed ought not to cover his head, since he is the image and glory of God; but woman is the glory of man.

When I look at the deeper meaning of these passages of Scripture, I don’t really see God being the fashion police dictating styles of dress. I see God using attire to make the point that He made the genders different, because He intended for them to be different, and to stay different. God calls any attempt to minimize the differences between the genders an abomination.

The specific type of clothing that we wear is not important in the sight of God. Jesus makes that point in **Matthew 6:25-33**, which says:

25 “Therefore I say to you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink; nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food and the body more than clothing?

26 Look at the birds of the air, for they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they?

28 “So why do you worry about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin;

29 and yet I say to you that even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these.

30 Now if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is, and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will He not much more clothe you, O you of little faith?

31 “Therefore do not worry, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’

32 For after all these things the Gentiles seek. For your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things.

33 But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you.

I conclude that God is not overly interested in the types of fashion with which we array ourselves. He does, however, in our text, decree that women’s fashions and men’s fashions should be different, simply to spotlight the differences in the genders.

Gender differences will not be eternal differences. **Galatians 3:26-29** tells us:

26 For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus.

27 For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ.

28 There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.

29 And if you are Christ’s, then you are Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise.

The promise is the promise of eternal life in heaven, at which time we will be neither male nor female. Gender will not be an issue in heaven. Marriage, which is the primary relationship between the genders, is also an earthly relationship. The Sadducees, who did not believe in life after death, challenged Jesus’ teaching on life after death by relating a conundrum about a woman that had, under the statute of Levirate marriage, successively married seven brothers, each of whom died, leaving her a widow. They then questioned Jesus, in **Matthew 22:28**:

28 Therefore, in the resurrection, whose wife of the seven will she be? For they all had her.”

In **Matthew 22:29-30**,

29 Jesus answered and said to them, “You are mistaken, not knowing the Scriptures nor the power of God.

30 For in the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels of God in heaven.

Gender differences are not eternal, but they are part of our physical, earthly existence, and the texts that we have read clarifies that God intends for us to maintain gender differences for the remainder of our stay here, after which we will go to a place in which those differences will not exist. Since gender is temporary, why are gender differences of such great importance to God that He would decree that to attempt to blur them even by something as trivial as attire is an abomination?

Genesis 2:18 tells us:

18 And the LORD God said, “It is not good that man should be alone; I will make him a helper comparable to him.”

1Corinthians 11:8-9 confirms this statement:

8 For man is not from woman, but woman from man.

9 Nor was man created for the woman, but woman for the man.

The female was created for the male. Independence of the genders from one another is not in the design of God, except in the minority of cases in which God has given someone the gift of celibacy. **1Corinthians 11:11-12** explains:

11 Nevertheless, neither is man independent of woman, nor woman independent of man, in the Lord.

12 For as woman came from man, even so man also comes through woman; but all things are from God.

Men need women and women need men. Our differing functions, strengths and weaknesses are the reasons we need one another. Simply because we have the ability to function outside of our need for one another does not mean that the need does not exist. The plan of God is not just that we are born, reach physical maturity, acquire the possessions of adulthood, use them, and then die. The plan of God is that we create a legacy to which we can pass on our acquired wisdom and our knowledge of Him.

In Genesis, when God decreed that man needed help, God did not mean that the man needed help with any of the tasks needed to make the garden grow. God created the garden and the fruit of the trees without the intervention of man, and God could easily sustain the garden without the intervention of man. God told Noah after the flood, in **Genesis 8:22**:

22 “While the earth remains, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, winter and summer, and day and night shall not cease.”

God created the genders, not so that we could participate in the raising of crops, but the raising of children. **Genesis 1:27-28** records:

27 So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.

28 Then God blessed them, and God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it; have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over every living thing that moves on the earth.”

God created male and female so that the two could marry and become partners in the creation and the raising of children. God designates children that do not have a married couple as parents as illegitimate. Before the coming of Christ, illegitimacy was considered as grounds for excommunication from the fellowship of God. **Deuteronomy 23:2** tells us:

2 “One of illegitimate birth shall not enter the assembly of the LORD; even to the tenth generation none of his descendants shall enter the assembly of the LORD.

God makes it clear that marriage is for the legitimate raising of children. Malachi, in explaining to Israel why God was not blessing them although they were making the proscribed offerings and sacrifices to Him, says, in **Malachi 2:14-16**:

14 Yet you say, “For what reason [is the Lord not blessing us]?” Because the LORD has been witness between you and the wife of your youth, with whom you have dealt treacherously; Yet she is your companion And your wife by covenant.

15 But did He not make them one, having a remnant of the Spirit? And why one? He seeks godly offspring. “Therefore take heed to your spirit, and let none deal treacherously with the wife of his youth.

16 “For the LORD God of Israel says that He hates divorce, for it covers one’s garment with violence,” Says the LORD of hosts. Therefore take heed to your spirit, that you do not deal treacherously.”

The plan of God is simple.

God has so fixed the reproductive and maturation process that the proper nurturance of children, in the normative case, requires the polarity of male and female to be optimally accomplished, just as a plant needs the polarity of water and sun to grow successfully. It is optimum that children have the nurture of male and female parents, and that they also have the demonstration of the interaction of both parents to grow into adults that can successfully duplicate the process, planned by God, that they have seen their parents complete in raising them.

I can tell you that, in my personal case, I decided to get married because I missed the interaction that I had with Mom. I recognized, however, that I did not want to go back to being a little boy, but I that that which I really wanted was the type of interaction that Dad had with Mom. I married the first girl that I met that, like Mom, was pleasant, smiled a lot and could cook. My future wife put me at ease in our first conversation by telling me a joke. It probably wasn’t the best joke that I had ever heard, but I could not remember ever meeting a girl that was welcoming and friendly and didn’t seem to want something. This girl seemed to be neither needy nor demanding, but just joked around like a regular person. Although she acted like a regular person, I could see, even from a distance, that she was a girl. There was no question about it.

The polarity between masculine and feminine roles is necessary to maintain a marital relationship. It is interesting that psychologists report that while people can theoretically justify role reversal between male and females in marriage, in practical application, role reversal tends to destroy the marriage. In the normative case, the gender distinctions are built in.

To illustrate, let us look at the case of Lisa, who, because of illness, had to keep her counseling appointment by telephone. She began by saying, “After 30 years of marriage, we need to work on our communications. I know that I’m bossy and demanding and when PMS hits, I’m all of the above. I really am trying to help our marriage, although I know that I have these behavioral traits. I know that I’m supposed to support my husband, but with all the demands placed on me and all the responsibilities that I have in the marriage, it sort of leaves me empty, and when my husband wants me to do something to support him, I don’t have anything left. My needs aren’t fulfilled, and so I can’t find a balance.”

The counselor replied, “I don’t quite understand. What exactly leaves you empty?”

Lisa replied, “Fulfilling his needs.”

The counselor responded, “What needs are those?”

Lisa began her list, saying, “Well, I work full time, I go to school full time, I try to take care of the house, I do the shopping, I raise the children, I pay the bills. He works and brings in an income, we both do, but I take on most the responsibility for running the house.”

The counselor observed, “Sounds like you have a lot on your plate.”

“Yes, I do”, Lisa responded. “But my husband thinks that I am the problem and if I could just fix myself, our marriage would be fixed as well. I think that he is part of the problem.”

The counselor asked, “What does he want you to change?”

Lisa replied, “To not be so demanding, not be so bossy, and I agree with that.”

“So, have you stopped doing that?” said the counselor.

“Yes, I have”, responded Lisa. “I’ve tried really working on not being so demanding, and to close my mouth when we are in disagreement. Not to be so aggressive or forceful.”

“But you don’t have much respect for him, though”, observed the counselor.

Lisa hesitated. “I...that’s what he says”, she said.

“Well”, said the Counselor, “you don’t.”

“And I don’t feel that I’m respected, either”, responded Lisa, defensively.

“The counselor diagnosed, “Well, Lisa, you don’t have much respect for your man. You pretty much run everything.”

Lisa responded, “Yes. It’s been given to me, and...”

The counselor interrupted, “Well, I don’t know if it has been given to you, or you took it, or you made it difficult for him to do it because you’re kind of forceful about how things should be done, and men tend to abdicate so that they do not have to fight with their women.”

“And that could be partially true”, Lisa admitted. “Another reason could be that he just didn’t feel confident in doing it, and I am overly confident and said, ‘Oh, sure, I can do it. Not a problem. You don’t want to do it, I can handle it.’ So I took on all these roles and tasks early in our marriage, but now I am in my 50’s, and I’m exhausted.”

The counselor replied, “Yeah. That’s pretty typical. I can understand that. So, if you demurred in a womanly way to him and asked him to help pick up the slack for you, that would be him rescuing you.”

“Yes...” said Lisa, hesitantly.

“And he’d probably like that”, prompted the counselor.

“Yes”, Lisa replied. “But how do I best approach that? I was going to sit down and talk to him about...”

The counselor cut Lisa off. “Do you know how to act like a girl?”

“Uh...” started Lisa.

The counselor continued, “Have you ever seen an old movie depicting Victorian times? A woman would drop her little lace hankie, and the guy would pick it up and hand it to her, and she would just thank him and tell him how wonderful that was. That’s a ridiculous extreme, but you get my point.”

“I get your point”, said Lisa. I would feel foolish doing it, but yes, I understand your point.

The counselor declared, “Well, Lisa, it’s a shame that you’ve gotten to be such a worker ant, so much that you’ve forgotten how to enjoy being womanly. In more genteel times, men opened doors for women, treated women with respect, actually courted women to obtain their favor and showed women the respect of making a marital commitment before obtaining sexual favors. There was a time when men were men and women were women, and each gender had a role to fulfill to take care of the other. The plan was never for people to be alone or to take on life alone. That’s why God made both genders, and made them, not identical, but interdependent on one another. I have a peer that is a very strong, very competent, very direct woman, one that doesn’t pussyfoot around about things and doesn’t bite her tongue. She told me that she hasn’t touched an entrance door to a public building in years. She would stand in front of a door for three hours until someone with a male body opened the door for her. She would then smile and

say, “Thank you so much, that’s very so sweet of you.” Be it a total stranger, or somebody she knows, she will not move until that door is opened by a man. Now, why is that?”

“Okay, why?” asked Lisa.

The counselor replied, “Because she thinks that the masculine and feminine roles are wonderful, and the respectful, playful interactions that she has with men are so enjoyable, that she wants it to be the norm in her life, so she uses her femininity at every opportunity. I think that you have lost that.”

“Well”, Lisa huffed, “I’ll be honest with you. I don’t like to play games, and I think that...”

The counselor cut her off, saying, “It is not a game. It is not a game. Wait a second. It is a game, and I think that it is a wonderful game. Some games make people feel great. The fact that it is a game doesn’t make it meaningless or frivolous. This game is just another form of communication. A lot of very strong women think that communication means that you sit down and dictate. But communication also is that you look dreamily over your shoulder and say, “Sweetie, I can’t do this anymore. My head is going to explode. Can you help me with this? Please, rescue me.”

Lisa thought. “Okay”, she hesitated, “So indirectly, I’m going to propose that...I’m going to state that...”

The counselor stopped her with a question. “What are you wearing right now?”

Lisa replied, “I’m at home sick. I’m wearing my flannel pajamas.”

“Hmm”, said the counselor, “I could have guessed that. You do not treat yourself like a woman. Hence, your man has very little place in your life. You think of marriage like a business association rather than a delicious, passionate relationship between the masculine and the feminine. Yes, there are practical things that need to be done, but you need the interplay of the masculine and the feminine.”

“I don’t know where that boundary is”, Lisa said, sadly.

“You’ve pushed it so far away that you’re scared of it”, responded the counselor.

“That might be true”, said Lisa.

The counselor continued, “Your husband wants nothing more than for you to remember being a woman and enjoying it. You seem to think that it’s a loss and it will make you empty. I think that it will fill you up in ways that you can’t even imagine.”

Lisa said, “I’m so empty right now that I’m desperate to try anything.”

The counselor prompted, “Try being a woman. What would a sick woman at home call her husband for?”

Lisa hesitated. “Uhh...I’m not sure.”

“Well, let’s play”, the counselor responded. “This is a movie. This sick woman at home, she’s sniffing, and her nose is red. Now why would she have to call her man and what would she like him to do?”

“Get me a Kleenex, rub my back”, offered Lisa.

The counselor added, “Snuggle with you.”

“Snuggle with me”, responded Lisa.

“Hold you and comfort you and keep you warm while you shiver and sneeze in his arms”, prompted the counselor.

“Well”, said Lisa, “I don’t do that...because he doesn’t see me in that role...”

“No”, responded the counselor, “You don’t do that because you don’t see yourself in that role. You are his lenses. He will only see what you let him see. That’s how guys are. But he’s going to love it. He’s not going to embarrass you, but you’re going to feel stupid because you’re out of practice. He is not going to embarrass you; he will feel like someone just gave him a blood transfusion.”

“Right”, replied Lisa, “and honestly, that’s what I want.”

The counselor said, “Yeah. Your husband is going to love this, and it won’t make you feel empty. It will fill you up.”

Lisa responded, “Well, that’s what I need right now.”

The counselor observed, “You’re empty because you’ve been under lifelong marching orders to not have emotional needs.”

Lisa, crying, said, “Yes, I have, and that’s why I’ve been so demanding. I’ve been asking for it in the wrong manner. I didn’t know how to. I never would have thought of that approach. It’s not me.”

“It is you”, responded the counselor. “It is a part of every woman. And it is glorious and wonderful. Now, you can look at a man and say, “Pick me up over this puddle and do it now and do it the way I want it done.” Or you can go, “Oh, you big, strong man, can’t you pick me up a carry me over this puddle? I don’t want to get my shoes dirty. Kiss. Kiss.” That’s game playing, and it is one of the lovely parts of a relationship between a woman and a man.”

Lisa said, “You know, he’s going to look at me weird.”

“Yeah”, responded the counselor, “He’s going to wonder who replaced you with a woman. He’s going to love it. So, right now, is he in the house with you?”

“Yes”, said Lisa, “He is in his last week of rehab from knee surgery. He can get around and everything, but he’s just not done with his physical therapy. He should be going back next week for the last time.”

The counselor explained, “Okay. You’re going to call him and say, ‘Honey, I’m all achey. Can you rub my neck a little bit? Then open up your flannel jammies and push them back so that you’re entire shoulder is revealed.’”

“Right”, said Lisa, “Right. The visual.”

“Then, when he starts to rub, you’re going to say, ‘Oh, that feels good.’”, said the counselor.

“Okay”, responded Lisa. “Yes, I can do that.”

“If you’re husband doesn’t have a heart attack”, continued the counselor, “call me back in the next hour. If he has a heart attack, you’ll be in the ER, but assuming he doesn’t, you should have something to tell me in the next hour. Your problem is that you have pushed away a whole dimension of your being, and we need to get it back, and I think that you married a nice enough man to help you do it.”

“Yes”, Lisa agreed, “but I’ve just spurned him so much...”

“You know what?” responded the counselor. “Guys are easily fixable and it is easy for you to make them forgive and forget. You just have to turn on the girl stuff. What do you think that God gave it to you for?”

“Yeah”, said Lisa, “I just forget that God is in control, not me.”

The counselor replied, “Did you notice that when you stopped breastfeeding your children, they didn’t fall off? There must be a reason for that. Now, go take care of business.”

Lisa contacted her counselor again two hours later. She said, “In my softest, most delicate voice, I called my husband and asked him to come to my room. He came, and again, in my softest voice, I asked him to rub my shoulder and my neck because it was bothering me. So I disrobed and laid on the bed, and he gave me a wonderful massage. I said repeatedly how wonderful it felt, how good it felt...and I think you know the rest. In his words, fireworks.”

“Good for you”, said the counselor. “You needed to have a little fun.”

Lisa responded, “But my question is that you stated that I showed him that I didn’t respect him. Will this show him that I do respect him?”

“Well, said the counselor, “It’s a beginning. Don’t you respect a man that makes your body sing?”

“Yes”, said Lisa.

The counselor continued, “That’s a start. Now start having him help you with some of the things that you’re just overwhelmed by.”

Lisa responded, “As a matter of fact, while he was giving me the massage, I asked him if he wouldn’t mind taking over some things, and I said it softly and demurely as you suggested. He asked what, and I said that I wasn’t sure yet, but the important things I’ll give to him, and the unimportant things, I’ll just let them go. And, he accepted it. He didn’t fight me back, he didn’t argue, in fact, we were both pleasant.”

“See?” asked the counselor.

“You were right”, said Lisa.

“Do you feel empty any more?” asked the counselor

“No”, said Lisa, “Not right now.”

Then counselor laughed. “Lisa”, the counselor said, “You’re on track. Get back with me every now and then so that I can rev up your engines. You just have to get in touch with your feminine side. I don’t want you in flannels any more. Do little shopping this weekend. Get a manicure and a pedicure, and start treating yourself like you’re a girl. Start talking to him like he’s the man and you’re his girl.”

“After we were done”, said Lisa, “I said that I needed someone to take care of me, and asked if he would take care of me? He said yes.”

“You’ve been underestimating him, haven’t you?” said the counselor.

“Perhaps”, said Lisa, “We’ll see.”

The counselor responded, “You don’t have to give it to me all at once, but that’s good enough. Stay in touch, Lisa, and don’t forget about your feminine side any more.”

God, in His infinite wisdom, is a master planner. God knows the way that we are created to function, because He created us. God has developed a plan for our lives, and challenges us to voluntarily implement that which He commands us to do in our lives. In our willful, sinful condition, we may have the arrogance to challenge that which God tells us because His ways are not our ways, and His thoughts are not our thoughts, but God admonishes us to not be arrogant, to not be deceived into thinking that we know best, and to follow His commandments because to do so will give us the best possible outcome. We should put our desires for dominance aside and

follow the commandments of God, regardless of how trivial or counterintuitive that they may seem to us, because God is the one who determines the outcome of our actions.

God's master plan is that we stay within the confines of our gender roles. He tells wives to obey their husbands and husbands to love their wives, not because He is a male tyrant that wants to subjugate women, but because He made us, He understands the bigger picture, and knows that the gender roles that He created will produce the best relationships for us over time. He wants our marriages to be fulfilling, whether we think that His advice is the best advice or not. That, however, is not the complete extent of the plan that He has made for us.

Not only does God love us and have our best interests at heart, but He wanted us to know the depth of His love beyond a shadow of a doubt. So He came to the earth, as a man, born of a woman, lived a perfect, sinless life as an example of how we should then live, and then, in order to make atonement for the sins that we have committed, gave Himself to die, at the hands of sinful men, in the most brutal way possible, as a sacrifice. No longer is our understanding of God tied to ancient testimonies of men who received His Word as private prophecy, but God made His intentions for us known on the stage of world history, dying the most public and brutal of deaths, followed by the most public and miraculous of resurrections from the dead. Jesus Christ died on Calvary's Cross and the rose from the grave so that we would have assurance that the instructions given to us in His Word, the Bible, are trustworthy. The truth of His Death and Resurrection are documented beyond question; only the antecedent assumption that the record is false could cause anyone to doubt its veracity. If there is any event in history that we can count on as being proven true by the historical method, it is the Resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Jesus Christ died so that our sins could be forgiven, and rose from the dead so that we could have enough confidence in His Word to live in the lifestyle that He instructs. As we go down from this place, let us do so; let us resolve to love one another, as He has loved us, and let us further resolve to show that love by playing the roles in our marriages that He has given us to play. **Philippians 2:1-11** instructs us:

1 Therefore if there is any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and mercy,

2 fulfill my joy by being like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind.

3 Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself.

4 Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others.

5 Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus,

6 who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God,

7 but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men.

8 And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross.

9 Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name,

10 that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth,

11 and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

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