

Biblical Perspectives and Transgender

Eunuchs. There are three passages in the Bible which refer to eunuchs and how they should be regarded. This could have relevance to the post-operative TS situation, where castration is part of their transition.

In **Deuteronomy 23:1**, eunuchs are to be excluded from entering the Assembly of the Lord. But in **Isaiah 56:4,5**, blessings are promised to this previously marginalised group. And in **Acts 8:26 - 39**, the Ethiopian eunuch receives a special visit from Philip, is converted, baptised and goes on his way rejoicing. Post-op TSs take consolation in these verses, in the hope that they will not be excluded from fellowship. In reality the response is not always as positive.

Deuteronomy 22: 5 ‘A woman shall not wear anything that pertains to a man, nor shall a man put on a woman’s garment; for whoever does these things is an abomination to the Lord’ (RSV)

AV is similar. NIV says ‘God detests anyone who does this.’ JB says ‘...anyone who does this is detestable to God’ and says in a footnote that the verse is ‘an allusion to immoral practices in Canaanite religion.’

I have met transitioned TSs who sense that this verse has no relevance to them. They have always seen themselves as gender female, so any cross-dressing they have done was before transition. They are now wearing the clothes of their true gender!

At face value the verse is a clear denouncement of any form of cross-dressing. However, we need to decide whether all the abominations in the Old Testament are relevant to us today or need to be interpreted in their historical context. When I studied the various abominations I realised that no Christian I have ever met has ever upheld all these rules, or believes they are applicable to us today. So how can we know which of these ancient laws apply and which don’t?

Well a good starting place is the Ten Commandments, listed in **Exodus 20**:

- | | |
|-----------------------------------|---|
| 1 No other gods | 6 Do not kill |
| 2 No graven image, don’t bow down | 7 No adultery |
| 3 Do not take God’s name in vain | 8 Do not steal |
| 4 Keep the Sabbath holy | 9 Do not lie or cheat |
| 5 Honour your father and mother | 10 Do not covet neighbour’s possessions |

I will now list all the abominations which the Israelites had to avoid and which commandments, if any, they relate to:

| | | Commandment |
|----------|--|-------------|
| Lev 7.18 | Sacrificed food eaten on the third day | n/a |

| | | |
|---|--|----------------|
| Lev 11. 10,12 | Eating swimming things with no fins or scales | n/a |
| Lev 11.20 | Eating winged insects | n/a |
| Lev 11. 41, 42 | Eating swarming things and things with many feet | n/a |
| Lev 18.22 + 20.13 | Lying with a man as with a woman | n/a |
| (this raises the homosexual issue, which we are not dealing with in this study) | | |
| Deut 7. 25 | Taking silver from graven images | 2, 8 |
| Deut 12. 31 | Worshipping other gods; child sacrifice | 1, 6 |
| Deut 13. 13 | Serving other gods | 1 |
| Deut 14. 3 | Eating forbidden animals, incl.pigs and rabbits | n/a |
| Deut 17. 1 | Sacrificing a blemished animal | n/a |
| Deut 18. 9 | Child sacrifice, divination, soothsaying, auguring, sorcery, charms, mediums, wizards, necromancy | 1.6 |
| Deut 22. 5 | Wearing clothes of the opposite sex | n/a |
| Deut 23. 18 | Earnings of a prostitute as an offering | 7 |
| Deut 24. 4 | Rules of divorcees remarrying (complex) | 7? |
| Deut 25. 16 | Cheating on weighing scales | 8, 9 |
| Deut 27. 15 | Making a graven image | 1, 2 |
| Prov 6. 16 | 7 abominations: | |
| | haughty eyes | 10? |
| | lying tongue | 9 |
| | shedding innocent blood | 6 |
| | devising wicked plans | 6, 7, 8, 9, 10 |
| | running towards evil | 6, 7, 8, 9, 10 |
| | breathing out lies | 9 |
| | sowing discord | 5, 9, 10 |
| Prov 20. 10, 23 | Wrong weights and measures | 8, 9 |
| Prov 28. 9 | Ignoring the Law | 1, 3 |
| Jer 32. 35 | Building altars to Ba'al; child sacrifice | 1, 2, 6 |
| Ezek 22. 11 | Adultery | 7 |

If we see the Ten Commandments as immutable, then any of the above laws which relates to one of the commandments should be adhered to.

The rest divide up into two main groups [a] dietary restrictions under Judaic Law and [b] regulations regarding sacrifices. Neither are directly relevant to Christians, who now live under the New Covenant.

Two references remain - lying with a man as with a woman and wearing clothes of the opposite sex. The first is pertinent to homosexuality and is beyond the focus of this booklet. The second appears out of the blue and is the only reference to crossdressing in the Bible. So why is it mentioned in this one place? Either it was sinful and the Israelites were forbidden to do it for this reason, or else the practice was inextricably tied up with pagan practices that were current at the time.

If we take the first possibility, then why is it mentioned only once and without any explanation as to what made it so detestable? Is it not dangerous to condemn cross-dressing on this single verse, without considering its context?

If we make the conclusion from this verse that cross-dressing is sinful, are we to follow the prohibitions in adjacent passages as well? Rules about how to plough a field, what materials clothes must be made of, forbidding bastards from entering the assembly of the Lord, no money-lending with interest, newly-wed men not allowed to fight for a year, thieves and adulterers must die - all these and many more are written clearly in nearby chapters. Are we to take them all literally?

Other references, whilst not being abominations, give specific instructions which, if they were applied literally today, would land us in deep trouble. One example of this is Deut 25. 11, where a wife is described as attempting to rescue her husband from an assailant by 'seizing him in the private parts.' Such a woman must have the offending hand cut off. We find this rather shocking reading, especially considering that if a woman did such a thing today she would probably be rewarded with a police commendation for bravery!

The second possibility is that the act of cross-dressing was connected with pagan practices like cult prostitution involving both sexes, a view supported by many biblical scholars. A condemnation as strong as this verse points to the likelihood of a link to sexual immorality of one form or another.

Some have argued that the silence over transgender issues may be because there were no transgender people (as we understand them) in biblical times. History would suggest that this is unlikely as most societies and cultures through the ages have recognised such people in one form or another.

On the other hand, if Deut 22. 5 is seen as referring to pagan practices and sexually immoral behaviour, and if cross-dressing transgresses none of the 10 commandments, then it must be weighed in the light of general biblical principles and common sense to see if it breaks basic moral principles. My conclusion is that it does not.

One additional safeguard can be taken and that is the examination of conscience before God. It is no good asking someone else to do this on one's behalf: it has to be done by the individual himself. Romans 14. 1ff is relevant here: 'Don't criticise him [your brother] for having different ideas from yours about what is right or wrong.' (NIV). In verse 4: 'Let Him [God] tell them whether they are right or wrong. And God is able to make them do as they should.' And verse 10: 'You have no right to criticise your brother or look down on him. Remember each of us will stand personally before the Judgment Seat of God.'

If the person's conscience is troubled and he believes that what he is doing is in conflict with his faith, then he should seek ways to change, e.g. by miraculous means, counselling or suppressing his transgender feelings.

If on the other hand his conscience is clear before God, and he believes that there is no conflict with faith or Scripture, then he is free to express his transgender side in an appropriate way, whilst always respecting others, whose views may differ from his own.

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