

Clothing and Gender Roles

By Al Felder

The goal of this study is to help the readers have a better understanding of the relationship between the clothes that we wear, and the roles that God has given men and women. Despite the idea of our present culture that gender roles are outdated, God is very clear in His word that He made male and female with a designed purpose. *“²⁶And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth. ²⁷So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them.”* (Genesis 1:26, 27) This designed purpose is set forth throughout scripture demonstrating God’s wisdom as Creator.

God has designed men and women differently. These differences can be clearly seen by the human eye in regards to our physical appearance. They can also be understood through relationships as we realize the different emotional needs of men and women. All of these differences are for the purpose of fulfilling the different roles that God has given men and women. When we reject these roles, we reject God. *“¹⁹Because that which may be known of God is manifest in them; for God hath shewed it unto them. ²⁰For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse: ²¹Because that, when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened.”* (Romans 1:19-21) Just like the rest of creation, the design differences between men and women point to God as Creator. A rejection of this knowledge is a rejection of God that leads to moral darkness.

While there are design differences between men and women that are suited to their given roles, each gender is equal before God spiritually and morally. *“There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus.”* (Galatians 3:28) All members of the body of Christ have equal access to God’s throne of grace. Men and women are not equal, however, when it comes to role distinctions.

As we stated before, this does not mean that the woman is inferior to the man as a person. Consider the example of Christ. *“⁵Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: ⁶Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: ⁷But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: ⁸And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.”* (Philippians. 2:6-8) Christ is not inferior to the Father. He is God. Yet, Christ submitted Himself to the Father in order to carry out the plan of redemption. Each member of the Godhead had a different role to fulfill for the purpose of completing the plan of redemption. In like manner, men and women have different roles for the purpose of

fulfilling God's plan for the home. Before we get too much further in the discussion of the differing roles between men and women, let's consider the need for clothing from a biblical perspective.

In the beginning, both man and woman were without clothing. *"And they were both naked, the man and his wife, and were not ashamed."* (Genesis 2:25) Prior to sin man had no shame. He dwelt in the presence of God without any fear. The man and woman that God created lived together in perfect harmony with one another, and with God. When sin entered into the world it changed this perfect harmony.

With sin came shame.

"And the eyes of them both were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together, and made themselves aprons. ⁸And they heard the voice of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day: and Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God amongst the trees of the garden. ⁹And the Lord God called unto Adam, and said unto him, Where art thou? ¹⁰And he said, I heard thy voice in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked; and I hid myself. ¹¹And he said, Who told thee that thou wast naked? Hast thou eaten of the tree, whereof I commanded thee that thou shouldest not eat?" (Genesis 3:7-11)

Clothing has become necessary as a result of sin. Guilt and shame, both spiritual and physical, are the result of sin. The more we suppress our guilt before God we sear our conscience. As this process occurs, our sense of shame for physical nakedness is lessened. In other words, the more skin we show demonstrates our lack of shame before God for sin.

The garments that Adam and Eve made for themselves were not a sufficient covering. For that reason, God made them coats of skin. *"Unto Adam also and to his wife did the Lord God make coats of skins, and clothed them."* (Genesis 3:21) By doing this, God gave a symbol of the sacrifice of Christ for the sins of man.

The first thing that died after sin entered into the world was a sacrifice, or Christ in a figure. *"And all that dwell upon the earth shall worship him, whose names are not written in the book of life of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world."* (Revelations 13:8) It is for this reason that Jesus is referred to as the "Lamb slain from the foundation of the world."

The sacrifice was divided between God and man. The flesh was offered to God as a whole burnt offering, and the skins were given to man for clothing. This signified Jesus offering Himself to God as a sweet-smelling savor, and providing man with the proper spiritual clothing. *"I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich; and white raiment, that thou mayest be clothed, and that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear; and anoint thine eyes with eyesalve, that thou mayest see."* (Revelations 3:18) *"But put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh, to fulfill the lusts thereof."* (Romans 13:14) We see, therefore, that God's spiritual clothing for man is represented by the material clothing

He gave Adam and Eve to cover their physical nakedness. Physical clothing is required by God, and should be worn in the way He has stated in His word.

With the necessity of clothing due to sin, the obvious physical differences between men and women are concealed. God has ordained, however, that our clothing be a reflection of these differences. *“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) God clearly pointed out the design differences between men and women in the beginning, and these differences are maintained throughout the Bible. When men and women seek to look the same in appearance, we demonstrate a rebellious attitude towards God’s original plan.

After the first sin, God reminded Adam and Eve of their respective roles due to their created differences.

“¹⁶Unto the woman he said, I will greatly multiply thy sorrow and thy conception; in sorrow thou shalt bring forth children; and thy desire shall be to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee. ¹⁷And to Adam he said, because thou hast hearkened unto the voice of thy wife, and hast eaten of the tree, of which I commanded thee, saying, thou shalt not eat of it: cursed is the ground for thy sake; in sorrow shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life; ¹⁸Thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth to thee; and thou shalt eat the herb of the field; ¹⁹In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground; for out of it wast thou taken: for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return.” (Genesis 3:16-19)

God did not give men and women these roles as a result of sin. These roles were already in place prior to sin entering the world. Sin did, however, cause these roles to become more difficult. The effects of sin on the world have made it more difficult for man to live, and sinful attitudes cause problems in relationships between men and women.

These same role distinctions are discussed in the New Testament as well.

“⁸I will therefore that men pray everywhere, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and doubting. ⁹In like manner also, that women adorn themselves in modest apparel, with shamefacedness and sobriety; not with broided hair, or gold, or pearls, or costly array; ¹⁰But (which becometh women professing godliness) with good works. ¹¹Let the woman learn in silence with all subjection. ¹²But I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence. ¹³For Adam was first formed, then Eve. ¹⁴And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived was in the transgression. ¹⁵Notwithstanding she shall be saved in childbearing, if they continue in faith and charity and holiness with sobriety.” (1 Timothy 2:8-15)

While there is much that can be said about these verses, my purpose in bringing them up now is to show the overall picture of God’s creative differences between men and women. The roles that God has given men and women revolve around how God created them. It is for this reason

that these roles are consistent throughout scripture regardless of the covenant that was in place.

The purpose of this paper is not to go into a detailed discussion of the different roles of men and women. It is to simply point out the differing roles as they relate to clothing. Having said that, I do want to briefly summarize these roles. The man is to be the spiritual leader of the home. He is to be the protector and provider for those under his care. The woman is to respect the Biblical leadership of the man. She is to aid and support him as he fulfills his role. The women must also make the home her top priority.

The role of the man is different from that of the woman, and it requires different apparel from the woman's. In scripture, the apparel of men was more suited for outdoor life, traveling, and hard physical work. It was for this reason that men girded up their loins. *"Gird up now thy loins like a man; for I will demand of thee, and answer thou me."* (Job 38:3) The process of girding the loins involved gathering the loose ends of the garment, and tucking them into a girdle that was fastened around the waist.¹ This was done so that men could run, engage in hard physical labor, and fight.

In her role, the woman is to be the cornerstone of the home raising her children in the ways of God. Her role did not require her to gird up her loins, thus, this is something that only men did in scripture. Instead, the women wore full-length dresses which covered them down to the ankle. *"²Take the millstones, and grind meal: uncover thy locks, make bare the leg, uncover the thigh, pass over the rivers. ³Thy nakedness shall be uncovered, yea, thy shame shall be seen: I will take vengeance, and I will not meet thee as a man."* (Isaiah 47:2, 3) In this passage, God metaphorically referred to Babylon as a woman. It can be understood from these verses that it was a shame for a woman to lift up her dress.

Let's take a more detailed look at the differences between men and women's apparel in the Bible. *"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) The phrase "that which pertaineth unto" is key to understanding this passage of scripture. It indicates that there were garments that distinctly pertained unto men. They were designed for men, and women were not to wear them.

A straw man that is often raised against this teaching is that men and women both wore robes during this time period. The logic thus ensues that these robes were similar, therefore, men and women today can basically wear the same thing as long as there are some cosmetic differences. The main problem with this line of thinking is that it ignores the clear language of the text. Specific garments that were distinctive to men or women are in mind here. Just because men and women have some similar garments does not mean that they have none that are different. We must keep in mind that the scriptures are discussing "that which pertaineth

¹ Henry, Matthew. *A Commentary on the Whole Bible*. s.l. : Ward, Lock & Co. p. 412. Vol. 5.

unto.” It is discussing specific garments that were only meant for men to wear, and specific garments that were only meant for women to wear.

The straw man not only fails logically, it fails historically as well. In Old Testament times, the robes worn by men and women were clearly differentiated.

“Thus, while women like men wore inner and outer garments the differences in appearance were noticeable since wearing of clothes of the opposite sex was strictly forbidden (Duet. 22:5). The undergarments for women were loose-fitting or baggy apparel (Prov. 31:24), and the outer robes were more flowing.”²

The robes of men were straighter and more form fitting than the woman’s, thus, one could easily tell from a distance whether or not they were looking at a man or a woman.

According to scriptures, there were several garments that only men wore. We have already pointed out the fact that only men girded up their loins. Similarly, God instructed Moses to make linen breeches for the priests to wear. *“And thou shalt make them linen breeches to cover their nakedness; from the loins even unto the thighs they shall reach.”* (Exodus 28:42) This was an undergarment worn by the priests for the sake of modesty. It prevented any indecent exposure while they were performing their priestly duties.

At some point in time, men developed these garments into outerwear. *“Then these men were bound in their coats, their hosen and their hats, and their other garments, and were cast into the midst of the burning fiery furnace.”* (Daniel 3:21) In this passage we read where Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego wore the Persian form of breeches called hosen. In reference to this verse, Matthew Henry says, *“They were bound in their coats or mantles, their hosen or breeches, and their hats or turbans, as if, in detestation of their crime, they would have their clothes to be burnt with them.”³* Men often wore these breeches as outer garments, or under their cloaks. This style of dress still exists in the Middle East today.

Other distinctively male garments in the Bible include the mantle. *“And it was so, when Elijah heard it, that he wrapped his face in his mantle, and went out, and stood in the entering in of the cave. And, behold, there came a voice unto him, and said, What doest thou here, Elijah?”* (1 Kings 19:13) The mantle was a large loosely fitting garment made of animal skins. Prophets were known for wearing mantles as a sign of their calling from God.

Only men wore the girdle. *“And these are the garments which they shall make; a breastplate, and an ephod, and a robe, and a broidered coat, a mitre, and a girdle: and they shall make holy garments for Aaron thy brother, and his sons, that he may minister unto me in*

² Chad Brand, Charles Draper, & Archie England, [ed.]. 2003. *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary*. Nashville, TN : B & H Publishing Group, 2003. p. 312.

³ —. *A Commentary on the Whole Bible*. s.l. : Ward, Lock & Co. p. 1250. Vol. 4.

the priest's office." (Exodus 28:4) We have previously mentioned the girdle in connection with men girding up their loins. Essentially, the girdle was a sash or belt that was often made of leather and went around the waist of the man. This item of clothing allowed him to gather up the loose parts of his clothing and gird them up so he would not be hindered when engaging in certain activities.

The ephod was another distinctively male garment. *"And the curious girdle of the ephod, which is upon it, shall be of the same, according to the work thereof; even of gold, of blue, and purple, and scarlet, and fine twined linen."* (Exodus 28:8) This was a garment distinctive to the priests. The ephod was an apron-like garment that was worn over the priest's robe and under his breastplate.

Just as women were not to wear that "which pertaineth unto a man," men were not to "put on a woman's garment." This lets us know that there were some distinctively female garments. Two of these garments appear in the same passage. ²²*The changeable suits of apparel, and the mantles, and the wimples, and the crisping pins,* ²³*The glasses, and the fine linen, and the hoods, and the vails.*" (Isaiah 3:22, 23) The wimple and the veil were similar in that they were both head pieces for women. Another common rendering for these words would be shawl. They wrapped around and covered the head.

Now that we have pointed out some of the distinctively male and female garments in the Bible, let's turn our attention back to Deuteronomy 22:5. *"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."* The word garment in this verse deserves special consideration. This word can be used for men or women's clothing, and it has reference to a large outer garment.⁴ This coincides with an earlier point that we made. The necessity of clothing due to the shame of sin conceals the obvious physical differences that God made between men and women. That being the case, He expects us to dress in such a way that males and females can be easily distinguished. Thus, the stress on the outer garment.

One thing that we must check at this time is consistency with what we have learned, and the New Testament scriptures. If, as I believe, the distinction between men and women's clothing is based upon God's creation and the roles that He has given men and women; we will find the same basic teaching throughout the Bible. A careful study of a few New Testament passages is in order.

The first New Testament passage that we are going to look at pertains to women. *"In like manner also, that women adorn themselves in modest apparel, with shamefacedness and sobriety; not with broided hair or gold, or pearls, or costly array."* (1 Timothy 2:9) The word

⁴ Gesenius' Hebrew-Chaldee Lexicon. *Blue Letter Bible*. [Online] BLB Institute.[Cited: 11 24, 2017.] www.blueletterbible.org.

apparel in this verse is the Greek word kata stole. This word means, “to send or let down, to lower, a garment let down.”⁵

Two of the distinctively male forms of apparel we studied in the Old Testament contrast the instructions that God gave women in the New Testament. They are girding up the loins, and wearing breeches. In both these instances, the garments of men were taken up so that he could perform his work more easily. The woman’s garment, however, was not to be like the man’s. Instead, her garment is let down. This is a noticeable outward distinction between men and women that is consistent with the rest of Biblical teaching.

The next New Testament passage pertains to both men and women. *“¹⁴Doth not even nature itself teach you, that, if a man have long hair, it is a shame unto him? ¹⁵But if a woman have long hair, it is a glory to her: for her hair is given her for a covering.”* (1 Corinthians 11:14, 15) The word covering in this verse means, “to cover oneself, veiled.”⁶ In the Old Testament we saw that the wimple and veil were two distinctively female garments that covered her head. In this passage we learn that a woman’s uncut hair is her veil today. Just as in the Old Testament, men are not to have this feminine garment. This too is a noticeable outward distinction between men and women that is consistent with the rest of Biblical teaching.

Before we move on in our discussion there is one other New Testament verse that we need to consider at this time. *“⁹Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, ¹⁰Nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God.”* (1 Corinthians 6:9, 10) The word effeminate in this verse means, “womanlike, womanly, and tender.”⁷ The word is listed separately from homosexual in this verse indicating that they are not synonymous. This word describes a man who has rejected his masculinity and identifies as a female. An effeminate man takes on the characteristics of female. This relates to our discussion in the sense that it is wrong for a man to take on the appearance of a woman.

We have discussed the reason for clothing as well as the necessity for distinctively different clothing for males and females, now we want to give some consideration to how much clothing must be worn. As we previously discussed, sin brought shame that made it necessary for men and women to be covered. To expose ourselves in a manner condemned by

⁵ Vine, W. E. 1996. *Vine's Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words*. Nashville, TN : Thomas Nelson, Inc., 1996. p. 31.

⁶ —. 1996. *Vine's Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words*. Nashville, TN : Thomas Nelson, Inc., 1996. p. 136.

⁷ Webster's Revised Unabridged Dictionary. *Bible Hub*. [Online] Bible Hub.[Cited: 11 24, 2017.] www.biblehub.com.

the scriptures shows our lack of shame for sin. In order to prevent this from happening, we must have a Biblical definition of nakedness.

We originally started with Adam and Eve in the garden, and we will begin there as well with our discussion on nakedness. Once Adam and Eve sinned they realized that they were naked, and they became ashamed. Initially they took matters into their own hands, and attempted to make a covering for themselves. *“And the eyes of them both were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together, and made themselves aprons.”* (Genesis 3:7) The word apron means, “girdle, loin-covering.”⁸ As can be understood from the meaning of the word, this garment did not cover much. It would be comparable to the modern bathing suits of our day.

God gave Adam and Eve a sufficient covering for their nakedness. *“Unto Adam also and to his wife did the Lord God make coats of skins, and clothed them.”* (Genesis 3:21) Artists’ depictions of these coats often cover little more than the aprons Adam and Eve made for themselves. The word coat refers to a tunic with long skirts and sleeves.⁹ The same word is used in reference to Joseph’s coat of many colors. *“Now Israel loved Joseph more than all his children, because he was the son of his old age: and he made him a coat of many colors.”* (Genesis 37:3) It’s hard to image Joseph’s coat being as skimpy as many make Adam and Eve’s out to be. In reality, it was not skimpy at all. Instead, the coats God made for Adam and Eve were like the tunics or coats worn by others in Old Testament times. We know this because it is the same word used over and over again.

Many believe that the line of nakedness is the knee. One Old Testament passage that we have already discussed is often used to support this belief. *“Take the millstones, and grind meal: uncover thy locks, make bare the leg, uncover the thigh, pass over the rivers.”* (Isaiah 47:2) Uncovering the thigh is said to constitute nakedness in this context. The word “thigh” in this verse actually has reference to the lower leg, or calf area.¹⁰

In the book of Revelation we are given an image of Christ that is consistent with what we have learned regarding how men and women should be covered. *“And in the midst of the seven candlesticks one like unto the Son of man, clothed with a garment down to the foot, and girt about the paps with a golden girdle.”* (Revelation 1:13) The phrase “down to the foot” has reference to a garment reaching to the ankles.¹¹ In the beginning, during the Old Law, and in

⁸ **Brown-Driver-Briggs.** 2290 chagowr. *Bible Hub.* [Online] Bible Hub.[Cited: 11 25, 2017.] www.biblehub.com.

⁹ —. 3801 kethoneth. *Bible Hub.* [Online] Bible Hub.[Cited: 11 25, 2017.] www.biblehub.com.

¹⁰ —. 7785 shoq. *Bible Hub.* [Online] Bible Hub.[Cited: 11 25, 2017.] www.biblehub.com.

¹¹ **Lexicon, Thayer's Greek.** 4158 poderes. *Bible Hub.* [Online] Bible Hub.[Cited: 11 25, 2017.] www.biblehub.com.

the New Testament we are given images of men and women covered with garments that concealed them to the lower leg.

On one occasion the Apostle Peter was considered to be naked. *“Therefore that disciple whom Jesus loved said unto Peter, It is the Lord. Now when Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he girt his fisher’s coat unto him, (for he was naked,) and did cast himself into the sea.”* (John 21:7) The word naked in this verse means, “clad in the undergarment only.”¹² In this instance, Peter was without his outer garment that covered him sufficiently, therefore, he was considered naked biblically speaking.

Once again in the book of Revelation we are given God’s requirements for being covered. *“I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich; and white raiment, that thou mayest be clothed, and that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear; and anoint thine eyes with eye salve, that thou mayest see.”* (Revelation 3:18) Jesus instructed the Laodiceans to buy white raiment from him that they may be clothed instead of naked. The word raiment refers to, “a long flowing outer garment.”¹³ Once again, a consistent image of nakedness is given.

As we conclude our thoughts, those of us with children should consider how the distortion of gender distinctions affects the training of our children. When we attempt to distort the distinctions that God has given men and women, children do not see the roles clearly nor as important to keep distinct. The movement to unify the sexes in appearance makes way for the changes in the roles God has given men and women. Men become more feminine and women become more masculine.

At this present time we live in a society that seeks to completely eliminate the very idea of gender. In reality, this is nothing more than an attack against God’s creative design. When we reject God’s planned design we fall in league with the Devil. *“And the angels which kept not their first estate, but left their own habitation, he hath reserved in everlasting chains under darkness unto the judgment of the great day.”* (Jude 6) Satan and the other angels that rebelled rejected God’s planned order for them. When we rebel against God’s design purpose for men and women, we too become guilty of the same sin.

¹² **Lexicon, Thayer's Greek.** 1131 gumnos. *Bible Hub.* [Online] Bible Hub.[Cited: 11 25, 2017.] www.biblehub.com.

¹³ **Concordance, Strong's.** 2440 himation. *Bible Hub.* [Online] Bible Hub.[Cited: 11 25, 2017.] www.biblehub.com.