

“Sex and Gender”
Deuteronomy 22:5, 9-12
December 7, 2025
Faith Presbyterian Church – Morning Service
Pastor Nicoletti

The Reading of the Word

We come one last time to the Book of Deuteronomy before we pause this series and return to it next fall.

If you're new with us, we've been going through the book of Deuteronomy section by section, and this is the passage we happened to come across today.

And our last text from Deuteronomy this year is a challenging one – one that strikes at a difficult topic.

Again, I'd encourage you not to panic, but let's dig into this passage in its Biblical context together.

With that said, we turn now to Deuteronomy 22, verse 5, and then verses 9-12.

Please do listen carefully, for this is God's Word for us this morning.

Moses said to the people:

^{22:5} “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 Yahweh your God.”

[Then skipping down to verse 9:]

⁹ “You shall not sow your vineyard with two kinds of seed, lest the whole yield be forfeited, the crop that you have sown and the yield of the vineyard. ¹⁰ You shall not plow with an ox and a donkey together. ¹¹ You shall not wear cloth of wool and linen mixed together.

¹² “You shall make yourself tassels on the four corners of the garment with which you cover yourself.”

This is the word of the Lord. (Thanks be to God.)

“All people are like grass, and all their glory is like the flowers of the field; the grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of the Lord endures forever.” [1 Peter 1:24-25]

Let's pray ...

Prayer of Illumination

Lord, once again this morning we come to a challenging passage of your Word.

And so we ask you to give us eyes to see, ears to hear, and hearts to understand your word to us, For our good, and for your glory.

We ask it in Jesus's name, Amen.

Introduction

Our focus this morning is verse 5.

It's a text about how biological sex relates to gender. And each of us will come to this text from a different place.

Some of you here this morning maybe have experienced or are currently experiencing some kind of gender dysphoria yourselves – some kind of distress over a sense of incongruence between your biological sex and your internal sense of self. Others of you may know someone very close to you who has experienced some kind of gender dysphoria, or even transitioned to some extent. Still others of you may be confused by the whole topic, and you're not sure what to think or believe. Others of you have mostly encountered this issue online, in the context of the culture wars, and you're mostly shocked and appalled that trans viewpoints have as much credibility in our culture as they have today, or maybe you come with the polar opposite view.

In any case, depending on your experience, you may have a whole range of feelings when we come to a passage like Deuteronomy 22:5.

My goal this morning is pretty modest. I want to look at our text in particular, and the Bible in general, to better understand what the Christian Scriptures have to say about the relationship between biological sex and gender, how we are to respond to that, and how God responds to us as we wrestle with these issues.

With that said, there is so much we won't cover, or go into as deeply as we could. Some of you have more detailed questions, maybe about how things like intersex conditions, or Rapid-Onset Gender Dysphoria, or cultural influences, or brain-sex theory, or eunuchs in the Bible, or some other topic fits into and shapes this discussion.

Others have more personal questions, about the details of your own experience or the experience of someone close to you, and what it looks like to navigate these topics of biological sex and gender.

And if you have topical or personal questions after the sermon, first, let me encourage you to consider coming and talking to me. I'd be honored to hear your story, or your questions, and to try to help in any way I can. I'm not an expert on this topic, but I want to walk alongside you if I can.

Second, if you want a resource to dig a bit deeper into this topic, one book I'd highly recommend is *Embodied* by Preston Sprinkle. I think Sprinkle has a wonderfully gentle pastoral tone, while holding firmly to both Biblical truth and scientific research, as he really hears the experience of trans individuals. His book has significantly informed this sermon.

There are some places I disagree with Sprinkle – most notably, I would recommend gendered pronoun avoidance in situations where he recommends pronoun hospitality. But on the whole I think Sprinkle's book *Embodied* is a very helpful resource.

But as we focus now on Deuteronomy 22:5, in light of the rest of Scripture, what I think we see is that our biological sex is a gift from God, which we are called to accept by living it out in our gender, because rejecting how we were made is (in some ways) to reject our Maker. But the God

who made us is also a God who seeks those who have rejected him in abominable ways, and he calls his people to do the same.

Let me say that again: Our biological sex is a gift from God, which we are called to accept by living it out in our gender, because rejecting how we were made is (in some ways) to reject our Maker. But the God who made us is also a God who seeks those who have rejected him in abominable ways, and then calls his people to do the same.

There's a lot there. Let's take it one piece at a time.

Biological Sex Difference Is a Gift from God

First, our biological sex is a gift from God.

The Bible tells us that God made humanity. And when he did, he made humanity male and female.

We read in Genesis 1:

“So God created man in his own image,
in the image of God he created him;
male and female he created them.” [1:27]

God made every aspect of humanity. And every aspect of how he made human beings is a gift.

And because the God of the Bible – the God who made us – is good, the gifts he gives are good. He gives them because he loves us. He gives them because he cares for us.

He has made us both spiritual beings and physical beings – and he cares deeply about both the body and the soul. Both the body and the soul are gifts, in all their facets – including our biological sex. That too is a gift God gives to each of us.

Now, by biological sex we mean simply the distinction of male and female that is written onto our bodies in the form of our reproductive organs, our external anatomy, our internal chromosomes, and our hormonal system that also produces secondary sex characteristics. [Sprinkle, 37] This morning, that's what I mean by the word “sex”: the physical and biological distinction between male and female, rooted in these physical attributes.

And the Bible tells us that from the beginning, God made humanity male and female, and that was a gift.

That's the first thing we need to see on this topic from the Scriptures.

We Are Called to Accept Our Biological Sex as a Gift, by Living It Out in Our Gender

Second, we see here that we are called to accept our biological sex as a gift, by living it out in our gender.

Now, let's clarify some terminology.

For the last 60 years or so, “sex” and “gender” “have been used to describe different aspects of our male and female experience.”

While sex refers, as we’ve already said, to our biological sex as male or female, determined by the physical attributes of our bodies, the term gender is usually used to describe “the psychological, social and cultural aspects of being male or female.” [Sprinkle, 40]

Gender has to do with understanding ourselves as male and female, and using cultural markers to indicate that we are male or female.

And that’s what our text is about this morning. When it says “A woman shall not wear a man's garment, nor shall a man put on a woman's cloak,” the point is that men and women should adopt the cultural markers that identify them with their biological sex – and not the markers of the opposite sex.

To put it another way, this text is saying that we should accept our biological sex as a gift from God, in part by acknowledging it through our gender – identifying with our biological sex personally, socially, and culturally.

One implication of that is that when we experience a sense of incongruence between our internal sense of self and our biological sex, it is our biological sex – the physical reality of our sex as male or female in our body – that determines whether we are a man or a woman. And the reason for that is that God gave us our bodies, and he cares about our bodies. God is the one who made us biologically male or female, and he tells us that our biological sex is a gift, which we are called then to accept. [O’Donovan, 6-8, 13]

Now, many of us do that without even thinking about it.

But for others, it may be a struggle. Others may experience an incongruity. They struggle to accept their biological sex as a gift because they feel that their internal sense of self, or the role they are more comfortable in socially or culturally, is at odds with their biological sex.

Now, for many who experience that, the incongruence is temporary and resolves at puberty. In fact, studies indicate that for between 61% and 88% of children who experience gender dysphoria, the dysphoria goes away on its own at puberty. [Sprinkle, 50]

For others, the incongruity may emerge suddenly, often in connection with discussions with peers or media. And in many of those cases, with help, this sense of incongruity can also be resolved, and the individual can become comfortable again with their biological sex. [Sprinkle, 159-178]

But for still others, that sense of incongruity can be persistent. It may begin in childhood and continue for a lifetime. And it can be extremely distressing. And those of us who have never experienced that don’t really know what it’s like. Try as we might, we really don’t understand their struggle or their suffering, and we need to be honest and up front about that.

For those with gender dysphoria, it can be a deeply painful and personal experience. And it may require care, counseling, and compassion.

But, in addition to being a personal and internal struggle, it’s often also a struggle that’s made worse by or even fueled by cultural elements.

For some, gender dysphoria is triggered or exacerbated by their experience of overly narrow definitions of what men and women are each supposed to be like. And if they don't fit that narrow mold, they can feel like their gender identity is thrown into question.

God gave each of us a body and a personality. Both are affected by the fall. But both are also gifts from God. And God calls each of us to live out the combination of the body he's given us and the personality he's given us. And for some of us, that combination fits right in with our cultural stereotypes for gender.

Some cultural stereotypes are degrading and dismissive lies told about a group of people by those in power.

But other stereotypes are really, in a sense, summaries of statistical averages – characteristics that seem to be true of many people within a certain category ... though not all of them.

Now, when it comes to biological sex, many of us have interests and personalities and tendencies that fit with the gender stereotypes – the statistical averages – for our biological sex. And that's fine.

But also, there are others whose personalities don't fit in with our gender stereotypes. They're more at the edges of the bell curve. And key to thinking through God's design for biological sex and gender is realizing that God intends that too.

As we see in our text, God intends for male and female to be clear, distinct categories in human life. That's what's going on in verse 5. And then in verses 9-11 we get other, more symbolic areas of life for Israel, where God reiterates the importance of categorial distinctions in what he has made.

But it's remarkable here that God gives no commands regarding the personalities, or the interests, or the gifts, or even the social roles of men and women. Instead, all he says is that whatever their personality, whatever their interests, whatever their gifts, whatever their roles in broader society, they should fulfill those roles, they should live out their personalities, as men and women – identifying clearly as the biological sex God has made them.

And even the means by which they indicate that can change from culture to culture. Clothing changes in its meaning, just as the spiritual meaning of tassels in verse 12 is no longer the meaning of tassels in our culture today. In the same way, while a skirt signals "I am a woman" in America, in Scotland or in the Polynesian islands, a very similar piece of clothing signals "I am a man." [Sprinkle, 93] And God is not particularly interested in legislating for one such gender marker over another.

God here gives neither detailed clothing directions, nor lists of stereotypical interests or personality traits for men and women, but he does something much more simple: he calls us simply to accept the gift of our biological sex by adopting the symbols of our culture, to signal that we are male or female, according to our biological sex.

God here calls for men and women to be distinct. But he doesn't call for all men to be the same, or for all women to be the same. And when we insist that all men or all women be a monolith, then

we effectively tell those whom God has made with different interests, and different personalities, and different temperaments that they aren't really men, or they aren't really women.

But that's not biblical.

And God is not so boring as to make men and women that way. Yes, he has clearly divided humanity into male and female. But he's also created a wide range of personalities and interests among men, and a wide range of personalities and interests among women. He seems to delight in that variety spread across two distinct categories of male and female.

We do damage to ourselves and to others when we insist on all men or all women being bland monoliths – all the same as others of their biological sex. And that damage may account for some of the gender confusion among those who don't fit the stereotypes of their biological sex. Rather than trying to box them into a personality or interests that don't describe them, we are called to help them figure out how to live out what it means to be a man or a woman with their own unique set of personality traits and interests.

Of course, for some with gender dysphoria, setting aside these stereotypes still does not relieve their distress.

And yet even if that describes you, the Bible still tells you that your body, with its biological sex, is a gift.

Accepting that gift may feel like an intense struggle ... but I'd encourage you to engage in the struggle – to wrestle with how God has made you. Because there's a world of difference between struggling with the gift God has given you, and rejecting the gift God has given you.

Struggle may be hard. But rejecting the gift has far darker implications.

To Reject How We Were Made Is (in Some Ways) to Reject Our Maker

Because to reject how we were made is, in some significant ways, to reject our Maker.

As Preston Sprinkle argues: “one long-term goal of discipleship is for all believers to identify with their biological sex.” [Sprinkle, 195]

For some, that may be a long-term goal in their discipleship of following Jesus – not a prerequisite before they come to know and love him.

But whatever the timeline, you may want to ask: Why is that a goal? Why does it matter? What's so wrong with rejecting our biological sex?

For that, we look to the second half of verse five. Now, the language is strong, but stay with me, because it's going to make more sense as we dig deeper.

Moses writes: “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 Yahweh your God.”

“An abomination to Yahweh your God.” What does that mean?

Well, in the Book of Deuteronomy, Moses uses the Hebrew word for “abomination” (*toebah*) 17 times.

One of those times is here, regarding gender expression.

Once it’s used to describe financial fraud – using false scales to cheat someone. [Deuteronomy 25:13-16]

Twice it’s used for violations of Israel’s ceremonial law. [Deuteronomy 14:3, 17:1]

Two other times it’s used to describe sexual sins: once regarding prostitution [Deuteronomy 23:18], and once regarding immoral divorce and remarriage practices [Deuteronomy 24:4]. Leviticus also uses it three times to describe sexual sins – both heterosexual [Leviticus 18:26-30] and homosexual [Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13].

So it is used two or three times in Deuteronomy – maybe six times total in the Law of Moses to describe sins related to sexuality and gender.

But far more than that – eleven times here in Deuteronomy – this word “abomination” is used to describe idolatry: the rejection of Yahweh for other, false gods. That’s how it’s used the majority of times it’s used in Deuteronomy. That’s what we see in Deuteronomy 7[:25-26], and Deuteronomy 12[:31], and Deuteronomy 13[:14], and Deuteronomy 17[:1, 4], and Deuteronomy 18[:9-14]], and 20[:18], and 22[:5], and 23[:18], and 24[:4], and 27[:15], and 32[:16].

The primary way this word is used is in regard to idolatry: sins that are at root about rejecting the God who made us.

And I think that’s important, because I think that should shape how we read the word here in verse five, when God says that a man who presents as a woman or a woman who presents as a man “is an abomination to Yahweh your God.” Because this isn’t about God rejecting a class of people, or a certain minority group. This is about God responding to those who have, in a deep and significant way, rejected him.

Because to reject how we were made is, in some real and significant ways, to reject our Maker.

God designed us. He shaped us. He gifted us with many things. And to reject his design, to reject his gifts, is to reject him – to refuse his role in our life as our Creator and our Lord.

Now, knowing that doesn’t erase the distress some feel over their bodies – it doesn’t end the struggle that some feel to accept their biological sex. But as I said a moment ago, there’s a big difference between struggling with the gift, and rejecting the gift.

Because even as we struggle, we can cling to the belief that God cares for us, that God made us, that God knows what he is doing, even if we don’t understand it. When we reject the gift, we reject God’s intentions for us in exchange for our own. And so, if we feel that mismatch, our call is to trust him ... even if the gift feels to us like a wrong fit.

That may be a very difficult road to walk. But it’s a road God promises to walk with you on as you trust in him.

So, when we step back what we see is that our biological sex difference is a gift from God, which we are called to accept by living it out in our gender, because rejecting how we were made is (in some ways) to reject our Maker.

The God Who Made Us Is Also the God Who Seeks Those Who Have Rejected Him in Abominable Ways

But as we consider the Scriptures as a whole, that's not all the Bible has to say on this matter. Because the God who made us – the God of the Bible – is not a God who just issues a command and then leaves the ball in our court. He's not a God who stays at a distance.

Instead, he is a God who seeks those who are struggling, and seeks those who are lost. In fact, the Bible tells us, he even seeks those who have rejected him in abominable ways.

We are especially reminded of that in this Advent and Christmas season. Because in this season we remember that in Jesus Christ, God himself drew close to his creatures.

And when he did ... what kind of people did he draw close to?

Shockingly, as we read the Gospels we see that in Christ, God drew close especially to those who had rejected him in ways that God himself said were abominable.

First, he drew close to tax collectors [Matthew 9:10-11, 11:19; Mark 2:15-16; Luke 5:29-30, 7:34, 15:1] – those who in first-century Israel were known for committing fraud – a sin God called an abomination in Deuteronomy 25.

Elsewhere in the Gospels Jesus declared that he had opened the Kingdom of God to the prostitutes [Matthew 21:31], another sin identified as an abomination in Deuteronomy [23:18].

Moreover, Jesus was known to associate with notorious sinners [Matthew 11:9] – those who had rejected God in the very sort of ways that God declares are an abomination. That's who Jesus associated with.

And he didn't just associate with them. As the Apostle Paul made clear, he came to save them. He came, Paul writes, to wash them, to sanctify them, to justify them, "in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God." That's what Paul says in 1 Corinthians 6[9-11] after listing a number of sins that God himself identified as abominations.

And so, struggling with an abominable sin, committing an abominable sin, sinning in a way that rejects the very God who made you, while indeed serious, and deeply concerning, does not put someone beyond the reach of God's grace. Far from that, such sinners – even those who are the chief of sinners – are precisely those whom Jesus came to save – whom he sought out to know and love in his incarnation. That's what Advent is about.

In the gospel of Jesus Christ, God comes not to revile, not to crush, not to reject sinners ... but he comes to seek them. He comes to wash them clean of their sins. He comes to sanctify them, to set them apart in his name, and to grow them in holiness. He comes, in other words, to declare them

forgiven – full members of his Kingdom, “in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God,” as they trust in him.

And interestingly, he says that it’s often those who seem caught up in such abominable sins who are quicker to respond to the gospel than those who seem far more put together and proper.

After all, Jesus said to the elders and the chief priests – to the top religious leaders of his day: “Truly, I say to you, the tax collectors and the prostitutes go into the kingdom of God before you.” [Matthew 21:31]

They come into the kingdom. And in the kingdom of God, they are a blessing to others and a delight to God.

So, do not assume that because you or someone you love is currently caught up in these sins that you or they are too far from the Kingdom of God to be reached. When Jesus came, it was such people who especially received and embraced him, and whom he welcomed into his kingdom.

That can be true for many different kinds of people, including those struggling with trans issues. If Jesus had come today, I suspect it’s those very people he would be seeking and loving today.

The God who made us is also a God who seeks those who have rejected him, even when they’ve done so in abominable ways.

God Calls His People to Seek Those Who Reject Him, Just as He Does

The last thing we need to see here is that just as God seeks sinners who have rejected him, so he also calls his people to do the same.

There are a lot of issues to be concerned about in our culture when it comes to gender and sexuality. And we should be concerned.

But far too often we get caught up in fear and outrage, rather than seeking to love those who are lost, as our Savior did.

“There’s plenty of fodder for outrage” in our culture, Preston Sprinkle writes. “But,” he adds, “outrage doesn’t change the world. Love changes the world.”

Outrage doesn’t change hearts or minds – far more often it drives them away. But love and grace can change people. Love and grace can transform people. And love and grace do not mean compromising the truth.

Sprinkle puts it like this – he writes:

“I’m constantly challenged by the grace/truth tension in Jesus. He had a high ethical standard. So high that nobody can live up to it. And yet Jesus loved those who fell short of it. Just look at the Sermon in the Mount. Jesus’ sermon is one of the most ethically rigorous speeches in all religious history. Try reading through the whole thing in the morning and then live that way for the day. You’ll fail before breakfast. Jesus had a ridiculously high standard for obedience, yet he excessively loved those who fell short of it.

“Jesus wasn’t ‘pro tax collecting,’ and yet tax collectors flocked to him. Jesus opposed adultery, but stood up for the adulterers – not their behavior, but their humanity. Jesus stood against sin, and yet sinners wanted to be in his presence. The marginalized, the hurting, the shamed and shunned – they all wanted to be around Jesus. They wanted to go to his church. Do they want to go to yours?

[...]

“Jesus was against many things, but somehow he had a reputation of being *for* people. Somehow Jesus was able to have a clear ethical stance, to speak out clearly against sin, and yet to still draw to himself the very people who were found guilty by his words.”

And so, Sprinkle writes:

“As the number of trans* people in the world increases, our church should have more trans* people, not fewer. Not because our ethic is weak or unclear, but because it is strong and wholistic – true, courageous, compassionate, and humble. If people – especially marginalized and broken people – come into our communities, they should never want to leave.” [Sprinkle, 221-225]

Conclusion

We are called to love sinners because Jesus loved sinners. We are called to love abominable sinners, because Jesus loved us – abominable sinners, every one of us. For we have all turned from God in acts of spiritual idolatry, and so we are all abominable before God’s law.

But in Jesus, God has sought us. In Jesus, God has washed us, he has sanctified us, he has forgiven us and made us his own.

We should receive his grace. And then we should reach out, in love and grace, to other abominable sinners. Because while the details of their struggles may look different from ours, at heart, we are the same: broken sinners in need of God’s grace.

And that grace comes to them as it comes to us: in the loving mercy of Jesus Christ.

And by that grace, we can help one another to accept all the good gifts that God gives to us.

Amen.

This sermon draws on material from:

- Alter, Robert. *The Five Books of Moses: A Translation with Commentary*. New York, NY: Norton, 2004.
Block, Daniel I. *The NIV Application Commentary: Deuteronomy*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2012.
Brown, Raymond. *The Message of Deuteronomy: Not by Bread Alone*. The Bible Speaks Today. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity: 1993.
Craigie, Peter C. *The Book of Deuteronomy*. NICOT. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1976.
Millar, J. Gary. *Now Choose Life: Theology and Ethics in Deuteronomy*. Downers Grove, IL: Apollos, 1998.
O’Donovan, Oliver. “Transsexualism: Issues and Arguments.” Cambridge, UK: Grove Books Limited, 2007.
Sprinkle, Preston. *Embodied: Transgender Identities, the Church & What the Bible Has to Say*. Colorado Springs, CO: David Cook, 2021.
Wright, Christopher. *Deuteronomy*. NIBC. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1996.

Note: In my preaching I often cite and draw from a range of sources, which includes material from Christians within my theological tradition, Christians outside my theological tradition (in keeping with our church’s

core value of “Reformed Catholicity”), and also (following the Apostle Paul’s example in Acts 17) non-Christians who are well outside of Christian orthodoxy and orthopraxy. And so, when I cite an author or a source, that citation should not be understood or construed as me necessarily agreeing with, endorsing, or recommending to others anything else from that author or source, except for what I explicitly say I agree with, endorse, or recommend. When engaging with different materials and thinkers, all Christians must exercise wisdom and discernment to determine what is helpful, appropriate, and edifying for each person, taking into account their current needs, wisdom, and spiritual maturity.