

Women's Pants

It might seem absurd to take up space and time with such a petty subject; and indeed, it would be were not the issue such a bone of contention that it has literally become a test of fellowship among some spiritual "giants".

With the appearance on the market of a woman's garment that not only covers a woman's legs, but surrounds them individually, the religious community has arrived at widely divergent views as to their suitability. Some say the Bible expressly forbids them under any circumstances. Some say they should not be worn in public, others forbid them being worn to worship services, and others see nothing wrong with them whatsoever.

While I certainly do not expect to settle these questions for anyone, the subject needs to be addressed. If we can rid our minds of our prejudices, our personal likes and dislikes, and our cultural hang-ups and honestly examine what the Scriptures have to say about the matter, perhaps we can think it through to some sane conclusions.

We should first examine the Scriptural basis that is used to forbid women's pants. "The woman shall not wear that which pertaineth to 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 strict prohibitionists say that pants pertain to the man only, and therefore a woman should not wear any garment that fits that description. It must be admitted that at the writing of this scripture, pants were not in view in that they were worn by neither men nor women. That pants pertain to men therefore is strictly a cultural idea and has no basis in the scripture. What the scripture does say is that women are not to wear garments that are designed to clothe masculine bodies, nor are men to wear feminine clothes. A comparison of the male and female garments customarily worn at the writing of this commandment will reveal that there was less difference in the male and female garments at that time than there is between female slacks and male pants now. The scripture then forbids women to wear men's pants, not women's. And it likewise forbids men to wear women's pants and skirts, not men's kilts.

This does not, however, permit us to dismiss the issue as altogether indifferent and leave it up to everyone to do as he pleases. At least the cultural idea puts some doubt in our minds as to the expediency of the practice. And there are in other minds other considerations which we must honestly face.

Motivation raises a big issue for some. There is the idea that women wear pants as a symbol of rebellion against male domination. They want to "wear the pants" in the home in the sense of being bossy. Others are women wearing pants simply to display their bodies. Others yet see it as part of a plot in a "unisex" movement to obscure the sexes.

Without a doubt, there is validity in every one of these supposed motivations among some women. But we have no right to impute them to all. We are in direct violation of the apostle's commandment (Romans 14:3, 10) when we judge our brother's or sister's motives. Some women confess that wearing pants makes them feel independent and rebellious and so do not wear them at all. Others refuse to wear them because they feel immodest when they do so. Others refuse to wear them because they feel less feminine and less attractive when they do.

But we shall be less than fair and honest if we do not permit of other very practical motivations of some women to avail themselves of this convenience garment. To many they are cheaper and less trouble than dresses, skirts and blouses. They do away with the necessity of hose, keeping the legs shaven and shapely. They are more practical and more modest in some kinds of work and recreation, especially in travel when one is likely to flop around and fall asleep in all sorts of positions on a seat. I can assure you that when my mother went to pick blackberries fifty years ago, that she did not to go the briar patch in a skirt.

Women's pants can indeed be immodest and an occasion to flaunt the body; but dresses can be equally, if not more, provocative.

If some women took a good look at themselves from the rear in a mirror, they would rid themselves of any idea that tight pants made them more attractive. But it would be a totally prejudiced statement to say that pant suits are always less modest than dresses. They cover more than the dress does.

Now, let us think about the culturally impact of women's pants upon a Christian community that is traditionally conservative. We cannot avoid the fact that there are some definite "minuses" about wearing them, especially at polite occasions and to worship assemblies. Granted that women ought to be permitted to have more than one kind of garment in her wardrobe, and that pants will be better suited to some occasions than others, dresses offer the better choice in many others.

For one thing, the Christian woman will not want to abuse her liberty to the extent of being a stumbling block to other Christians who might have trouble with her pants. She would not want to attend worship in pants where all the other women wore dresses. One may now object to the idea of "dressing up" at all. Some believe any kind of external adornment is fleshy and ungodly. Let us be reminded that it was God Who so adorned the lilies of the field, and He is the author of all color and beauty. It is not ostentatious to wear our best to worship.

Women who wear pants all the time also inadvertently lose some of their feminine graces. They begin to slouch and flop themselves around like men. They are likely to become course and indelicate. Now, all this may sound outrageous to feminists, women's libbers who expressly want to eradicate any distinction between themselves and men. But to true men and true women who treasure the difference, this is no small consideration.

One more thing you ladies might like to bear in mind. If you will notice, you will find yourself treated with far more respect and consideration by men when you wear a skirt. They will be more likely to tip their hats, open the door for you, give you their seats, change your tire for you, and generally treat you as something just a little higher and more noble than a man, when you appear and dress the part.

- C. M.