

Faith, Gender and Me

Interview with a Transgender Christian

Elaine Sommers ©2008

No part of this booklet may be reproduced
or published without permission

Foreward

Elaine Sommers is the femme name of a male Christian living in the SW of England. The aim of this booklet is to raise awareness and understanding of transgender issues in Society in general and in the Church in particular.

The information is presented in interview form for readability, even though no interview actually took place.

Glossary – some definitions

Transvestite (= *Tranny* or *TV*) *A person who feels the need to dress and appear as the opposite sex to meet an inner feeling of that gender. Most TVs are male-to-female.*

Crossdresser (*CD*) *The same thing, though many prefer CD to the clinical sounding transvestite, with its connotations (Rocky Horror Show, etc)*

Transsexual (*TS*) *A person who feels they belong in the opposite gender to their bodies. Many TSs will only feel complete when they have transitioned, i.e. living full-time in the other gender. This often (but not always) includes taking hormones and undergoing gender reassignment surgery (GRS or 'sex change').*

Transgender (*TG*) *A coverall word that includes all the above. It allows these groupings to be considered as part of a spectrum, rather than clear-cut boxes. This is the term now in common usage. TGs belong to the Transgender Community.*

00000000

Elaine, you describe yourself as transgender. Which definition of TG describes you best?

I like to use transgender as the umbrella term, but if pushed to be more specific I am CD, not TS. However, it is too simplistic to see them as clear divisions, which is why I still prefer to use the looser term TG.

Does that mean you are gay?

No, I am heterosexual, and have no confusion about that. Transgender is about gender identity, not sexual orientation. It is estimated that the incidence of homosexuality in the TG Community is similar to that of the general population. My own observation in the TG world bears this out. Confusion may arise because of the publicity given to drag queens (such as Lily Savage and the like) most of whom are gay. They tend to caricature and satirise women in an exaggerated and sometimes crude way. It's misleading to consider them part of the TG Community, when they really belong to the Gay Scene.

Further confusion arises because TG people tend to frequent gay venues, simply because these are often the only places where TGs feel safe and accepted.

When did you start dressing?

I guess I must have been about 12 or 13. I got this urge to dress in women's clothes and experimented in secret. I thought I was the only person in the World who had these feelings. I dressed on and off over the years, but never dared to let anyone else know about it. I hated myself for being this way. I just wanted to be the same as everyone else. I became a Christian at 18, and thought that my TG side would go away, but it didn't.

Even so, my spiritual life developed and flourished and I have been a practising Christian since that time.

Did you keep the secret from your wife?

No, I told her on about our third date. Of course, she was taken aback, but we were in love, and it didn't stop our relationship blossoming. A year later we married. We were both convinced that, as time went on, the transgender feelings would fade away. We were wrong. We discovered later that for most TGs their situation lasts for a lifetime, and I was no exception.

When we started having children we felt it was important that my TG side remained a closely guarded secret. Opportunities to dress were few and far between. When I did grab the chance, it always caused friction between us, as my wife was very unhappy about my covert dressing activities.

Did you seek God's healing?

If I thought I was sick, then I would seek healing. If I thought I was demon possessed, I would pray for deliverance. If I thought I was indulging in a sinful act, I would repent and ask for God's forgiveness. At varying times over the years I convinced myself that I was in each of these situations, and tried to deal with them appropriately. At other times I managed to abstain from dressing for months at a time, occasionally years. But deep down I knew that the female side of me was still there. In spite of much advice, counselling and prayer, there I was, a troubled and confused transgendered person. God had answered so many prayers in my life concerning other things, why not this one? Why had I been dealt this card in Life?

What's happened since then?

Once the children had grown up, I got to thinking, why am I so mixed up about all this stuff. I started searching the Internet and discovered that there were thousands of people just like me, from all walks of life. Maybe it would be helpful if I could meet some of them and talk things over. So, calling myself Elaine, I ventured forth to a TG weekend function. It was a real eye-opener. For the first time in my life I found that my female side was accepted by other people, who understood exactly how I felt. That led on to being able to accept myself for what I am, no longer ashamed, or feeling I was a freak. I also began to sense that God accepted me too, just as I was. I was able to bathe in His presence, freed from the burden of guilt that had surrounded me for so long. It was life-changing.

What do you actually do when you are dressed?

Part of my time as Elaine is spent at TG events and weekends, where hotels are group booked for the purpose. These are wonderful times for making friends, supporting each other, chatting, laughing a lot, themed costume evenings, meals together, discos, etc. They are incredibly well-behaved gatherings and the hotels often comment what a pleasure it is to have our groups to stay.

The other things I do are just ordinary everyday activities – driving, walking, shopping, sightseeing, eating out, going to the theatre, etc. I have also developed a new career as a singer, providing cabaret entertainment at various TG functions. It is totally different from my male singing, and I really love doing it.

But I thought crossdressing was all about sex!

That's how many perceive it. Early on in the life of a crossdresser there may be sexual arousal in the act of dressing, but as time goes on that tends to be replaced with a feeling of peace, wellbeing and the pleasure provided by expressing the feminine persona inside. As far as sexual encounters are concerned, I have yet to be propositioned by someone at a TG event. If it happens, it's not at the sort of functions that I attend.

Have you met other TG Christians?

For a long time I thought that I must be the only TG who was also a Christian. But once I started attending events, I came across more and more fellow-believers from every denomination, ministers, deacons, lay readers and lay people. There is also a TG Christian group which I have now joined, that holds retreats twice a year. I get the impression that there are more Christians in the Community than you might expect in the general population.

Are you aiming to live as a woman full-time?

No, I am very happy in my male role, as a work colleague, a husband and a father. I am CD, rather than TS, and have no desire to live full-time as a woman. However, I would like to be able to express my female side when I wish, without deliberately offending or embarrassing anyone.

Why did you decide to 'come out' as transgendered?

In recent years I became tired of all the subterfuge and deception that had to be employed to keep this side of me secret. I decided that I couldn't face the rest of my life like this, looking over my shoulder and wondering if I was about to be 'discovered'. This, and the fact that I had become much more comfortable with the positive aspects of being Elaine, convinced me that I should be more open about it. After all, what was there to be ashamed of?

It took a lot of deliberation, heart-searching and prayer to make the decision. It would be a risky thing to do, and as a couple we had to weigh up the cost. My wife did have strong reservations about it, but in the end assured me that if I felt it was the right thing to do, she would support me, whatever happened. Having made the decision to go ahead, we realised that we would have to tell people in a particular order, starting with our grown up children and their partners. Then would follow our respective siblings and partners, and our friends. After that my work colleagues would be informed, and finally our church minister, elders and members of the church. I feared that it would be this last group that would react the most strongly. I was right.

And what was the response from each of these groups?

As far as our children, families, friends and work colleagues were concerned, the general reaction was very positive and loving. This level of support meant an awful lot to us. When it came to the church members, it was a bit like lighting a tinder box. Most people at least gave us their assurance that we were still friends and they would care and pray for us. But they were also shocked by the revelation, and that I was daring to continue to 'indulge in my chosen lifestyle'. Some of the letters we received were bordering on the hostile.

After many months of discussions and negotiations with the leaders of the church, I was told that I could still attend the church, but would not be

permitted to participate in ministry in any way, including worship-leading, which I had been doing for many years.

We felt that under these conditions we couldn't carry on, as we really wanted to continue serving God to the full. So it was with great sadness that we decided to leave the church. But how were we to find a new church family? Would every church react in the same way? Would we be spiritually homeless? Well, with the help and advice of our Bishop, we were put in touch with a local church which was prepared to take us in, no strings attached. We were quite open about my Elaine side, and people seemed to accept us as we were. We are now established with our new fellowship, and have started to contribute to the ministry, including music in worship, which is a real privilege.

Are you planning to go to church dressed?

No, in our current circumstances I think this might cause confusion in the Fellowship. However, in principle I don't have a problem with worshipping and praying when dressed, and from time to time I have attended other churches in this way. I believe it's important that I am able to express my spirituality as Elaine, as well as in my male role. When I'm dressed I often feel more open to God and what He's saying.

What are the downsides about being TG?

Almost all of the problems of being TG centre on people's negative attitudes towards the subject and those who are transgendered. The result is that the TG internalises everything, leading to feelings of shame, inadequacy and rejection, and the horrors of being seen as abnormal or a freak. This can often have a devastating effect on personal relationships, as wives or partners may be unable to come to terms with their other half's female identity and their need to crossdress.

Wives may only find out about their husbands' secret after many years, which add feelings of betrayal and deceit to the equation.

Crossdressers may be driven into extreme secrecy, with the constant fear of discovery. This can produce great tensions, anxiety and sometimes depression. They may also try total abstinence, with ritual purging of all female clothes and the decision to 'give it all up'. It rarely works, usually leading to frustration, misery, upset and the inevitable sense of failure when the dressing starts up again. The stresses and strains of all this can lead to mental health problems, even suicide attempts.

But is there a good side to it all?

Yes, definitely. If one could eliminate all the negative attitudes described above, what is left is really quite positive. The Transgendered Community is made up of an interesting and wonderful group of people, and I feel privileged to be part of it; I have gained many close and trustworthy friends. The social gatherings that I attend are full of genuine caring people, and are always

relaxed and enjoyable times. Many of the partners attend as well, and often impress me with the love and support they give their loved ones. The President of the Beaumont Society (the national organisation of the TG Community) said recently that she felt privileged to be 'gender gifted' and to have the best of both worlds, male and female!

The challenge of transforming a male appearance and behaviour into a female one brings out a lot of creativity and ingenuity. For some it's a nigh on impossible task, requiring all the skills and craft that clothing and makeup can provide. But in the end, it's not so much about whether you can 'pass' in public, but whether you feel comfortable in your female gender role. Being accepted as a female is a bonus.

Doesn't that result in confusion?

For those who encounter a TG there can be much confusion. Are they male? Are they female? What's going on? That situation is made worse if we only think of everything in tight compartments, and that we must squeeze everyone into one of them. Life isn't black and white and it is often helpful to loosen up and see that there are more varieties and shades to situations than we realise.

For the TGs themselves, being transgendered can certainly produce some confusing dilemmas. But as I have said, there are positive sides to it and life can be enriched by this extra gender dimension that others find hard to imagine.

You might also think that my female side erodes into my maleness, making me a feminised man. In reality it seems to be the opposite. When I have been Elaine and then return to my more usual male life, I feel a bounce in my step and a sense of well-being, which enhances the confidence and enjoyment of being a man!

So what about Deuteronomy 22.5? *'A woman must not wear men's clothing, nor a man wear women's clothing, for the Lord your God detests anyone who does this'* (New International Version)

Ah yes, that verse..... Well, it has haunted me all my life, but in recent years I have seen it in a different light. Read this verse in conjunction with the other laws around it and consider the historical context of the time. Explore it with an open mind, noting particularly that it applies equally to women as men. There are still conservative Christian groups in this country that will not permit women to wear trousers, as they are 'men's apparel'. At least they are being consistent in adhering to both parts of the verse!

I believe that to take isolated verses like this out of context and apply them literally to modern life can miss their true relevance for us, and could be dangerous. Since I have studied this verse at length*, and put it in perspective with the rest of Scripture, I can see nothing morally wrong in

being or expressing my transgender nature, nor does my heart sense any need of repentance.

**Elaine's study on the biblical considerations of this verse is found at the end of this booklet.*

But surely it is not honouring God?

If it was not honouring God, then it must be dishonouring God, which would be wrong. That to me would be sinful, and something in need of repentance. I believe that God has given us a gift to guide us through life, and that is our conscience. If we as Christians think or do anything which disturbs that conscience, then we know straight away that it's wrong, even before checking with Scripture. God has given us this special sense and we ignore it at our peril. Provided we listen to His voice and follow Him day by day, He will tell us when something is wrong. This is my experience over the years in all aspects of life, and believe me I have given God plenty of opportunities to let the principle to be put to the test. When it comes to crossdressing, my conscience is in no way troubled, and I don't see anything inherent in what I am or do that dishonours God. But as with all areas of my life, I must always be open to God to make sure that nothing dishonourable creeps in.

Why don't you just stop doing it?

If you were to ask me: Could you stop drinking tea and coffee? – I would say yes. I would miss the good feeling that a nice cuppa brings, but I'm sure I could do it.

If you asked: Could you stop engaging in any form of music – playing, singing or even just listening? – I would also say yes, but it would be a much harder task, as music is an integral part of my life, and something that expresses very deep feelings and emotions inside. It would be taking away a rich and meaningful side of me.

If you were to ask me to stop expressing any part of my female side, that would be harder again, because it goes even deeper into my being. I have been down the road of abstinence and denial many times and it has only resulted in tension, stress and misery. It suppresses a vital part of me. I really have no desire or leading to go down that road again. I have come to terms with my situation by accepting the way I am, without self-hate or shame. I am at last free from that great burden of guilt (I would say false guilt) that has dogged me for most of my life. I can face my God in total honesty and thank Him for loving me just as I am.

How do you expect me to react to your telling me about being TG?

One thing is for sure, I cannot possibly dictate or demand how you respond. Judging by my experience so far, reactions vary considerably. Some people have no problem with it at all, others are uncomfortable, and then there are

those who believe that it is totally against God and who pray for my healing and/or deliverance.

By being open about my TG nature, I hope that this will encourage people to think through the issues involved on a deeper level. Whilst your initial responses may be negative, I hope that in time, and with further reflection, a more open attitude may develop, so that transgender people can be accepted as they are, even though they are 'different'.

I would ask people to consider the whole issue and take time to learn more about transgender, rather than perpetuating the old stereotypes. I am happy to discuss it at any time, or provide further written information.

How should the Christian Church address transgender issues?

There has been lots of discussions in General Synod and the Evangelical Alliance (EA) about homosexuality, but not so much on transgender. The EA has produced a booklet on transsexualism, focusing mainly on the rights and wrongs of gender reassignment. I believe that the TG debate is much wider than this and that more aspects need to be considered. People like myself, who have dared to come out into the open, may have an opportunity to contribute to the debate and to help church leaders understand some of the problems that TG Christians face. If the Church could discover a more conciliatory and accepting stance in relation to TG, then much of the bitterness and anger which many transgender people feel concerning their fellow-believers and God could be dissipated. Some of the stories I've heard from TG friends about rejection and condemnation just make me weep. Could we get alongside these dear people that God loves so much, and share with them the hope and peace in which we believe? That is certainly what I am aiming to do.

Where do you see your transgendered journey going in the future?

It's always difficult to be sure. I hope to continue to express and enjoy my femininity, rather than struggling, fighting and denying it. I also hope that I will be able to help people to see that TGs can be responsible members of Society, and need not be feared, avoided, ridiculed or despised.

I long for the day when we in the TG Community are accepted and respected by those who do not themselves fit into the TG gender spectrum.

The Road to Acceptance

It has taken me most of my life to come to terms with being transgendered. At long last I have been able to fully accept myself and understand who I really am. I do not have all the answers, but at least I am content and at peace.

With that in mind, it would be unrealistic of me to expect those I know to accept my transgender side without any difficulty. In fact, I know that I cannot and should not expect or demand anything from them to that end. However, I do want to encourage my friends and family to consider these things further; then maybe they will be able to go some way along what I have called the Road to Acceptance.

I have heard a wide variety of opinions on transgender issues. I've listened to these viewpoints, as well as reading comments in books, magazines and newspapers. As a result I now identify four levels of transgender acceptance, though they are really part of a continuum. The purpose of defining different steps is simply to highlight the process a person might go through on their road to acceptance.

Level One: Intolerance

At this level transgender people may be regarded as sick, warped or perverted and are looked on with a high degree of suspicion. They are best avoided and may be considered a risk to children. The media can be intolerant too, sometimes 'outing' people in a negative light, with ridicule and misrepresentation. I speak from experience, having been the target of this sort of exposure, in 'The Sun' no less, and it was quite a distressing and traumatic time for me and my family. Fortunately, over this period we had wonderful support from friends, work colleagues and people we hardly knew, so we were able to weather the storm.

In some Christian circles any expression of the gender variance is seen as sinful and in need of repentance, healing or both. Church leaders may ban a TG person from all forms of leadership and ministry and even exclude them from church membership completely. I have met several people who have been turned out of their congregations: it is a dreadful experience to have to go through. Some have never got over it and remain bitter and alienated from the Church and sometimes from God too. This is a situation of great sadness. My own situation was one of exclusion from any form of ministry, which made me feel excluded by the fellowship. Who would want to remain in a fellowship that considers you are deliberately living a sinful life?

Level Two: Tolerance

The common response of many British people on considering transgender people (or any person who is different from the norm) is a kind of uncomfortable acknowledgement of their difference. Whilst they have a gut feeling that it 'isn't normal', they are not going to make a big deal about it. It's not talked about any more than necessary and then only in hushed tones or in

a rather embarrassed way, often mingled with some joking. Think how many pub jokes or remarks in sitcoms refer to men in bras, stockings etc?

In my own experience, this tolerant approach, whilst not completely antagonistic, often avoids facing the main issues. Life goes on much as before and my relationships with friends seem to be unaffected by the knowledge that I am TG. However, I am reluctant to raise the subject for fear of upsetting those friends or causing embarrassment. I sense that my gender identity issue is seen as my private business and something they do not wish to see or discuss further. Many churchgoers adopt this type of approach to TGs in their fellowship. They haven't really thought the subject through, but are quite prepared to tolerate it as long as that's as far as it goes

Level Three: Acceptance

The next level is a person who has accepted the fact that someone is TG and goes further by trying to understand the subject more. This may involve reading, talking with TGs and asking them questions with an open mind. It takes time to work through their deep-seated negative feelings that society, family and church have instilled into them. The person becomes more concerned for the well-being of the individual TG than before and will go to some length to try to support him or her in any difficulties and stresses they are going through. The initial embarrassment has now gone and they are comfortable to discuss the subject with their TG friend.

Many of my friends are in this position, and they are a great support and help to me. I still have a little reluctance to raise the subject with them, in case they wonder if my TG side is becoming too important for my own good. This can then lead to some awkwardness and transgender once again becomes a taboo topic, never to be mentioned.

Level Four: Inclusion

There is I believe a level beyond Acceptance where the TG side of a person is seen as something to be embraced and even appreciated by those around him or her. This is fuller acceptance, which I prefer to call Inclusion. The TG person is valued and welcomed, irrespective of whether they present in their adopted gender role, or their birth gender. Any confusion that this causes for the friend or family member is something that they are prepared to work through themselves, which usually needs some effort and heart-searching. Transgender is no longer seen as an enemy or something that needs to be discouraged (like trying to persuade a smoker to cut down or give up).

I do have some people around me who fit this description and I am very grateful for them. I can talk unapologetically with them about my Elaine side at any time or place, without feelings of judgment or disapproval. I know that they are happy to be with me in my male or my female presentation and some even prefer my company when I'm Elaine!

Questions

How can someone move along the road towards Acceptance?

First, people who have never considered TG before may, when presented with the subject, start out at any point along the road - not always at the beginning. It depends on their background and upbringing and the way they view the world in general. For some the issue of gender will be no big deal, whilst for others it is a big problem. Their individual starting point will make a huge difference to how their journey will progress and where they end up. Some people may never move at all. It is very difficult to know how to help them. The hard thing for TGs is to accept that people are entitled to their own views. It is sad to think that our trans side is so unacceptable to them, but it is not for us to try and force something on them.

Can the TG do anything to help a person along that road?

For those who are prepared to explore the issues and challenge their own initial reactions, I would first encourage reading around the subject (and that means wider than sensationalist articles in the gutter press). It would also be helpful to chat with anyone with specialist knowledge on the subject. Beyond that I would suggest talking with transgender people themselves, as this will bring a more personal perspective, seeing ordinary people who happen to have an extra dimension to them. This is about people and the sooner we look at it that way the better.

It is even more instructive if people are prepared to meet the TG in his or her transgender mode. This will help to diffuse any misconceptions a person may have about what it is to be TG and may put their mind at rest.

I have friends who have taken time to do some or all of these things and it has usually helped them greatly in their understanding and acceptance. Sadly, very few of my former church were prepared to talk with me and ask questions, let alone meet me dressed. There is little I can do about this other than accept that they are entitled to their views.

Can someone go backwards down the Road to Acceptance?

Some people I know have been reassuring when they first learned about my transgender side. They may have seen my dressing as a weekend pastime that wouldn't impinge on life in general, or they thought it was something I would eventually give up. As they realised that it was much more deep-seated than that, they started to back off and wish it would all go away. Their dis-ease increased as my discomfort decreased. They feared that I was going on the road to full-time transition, and were unsure how they would ever cope with that. Their level of acceptance seemed to be going backwards, a difficult thing for me to cope with.

So, yes, it does happen and I am not sure I can do anything about it.

What is your hope for the future?

My hope and prayer is that more transgender people will dare to stand up and be counted and that this will encourage those around them to explore the subject and consider how they can learn to be more accepting of those who are transgender.

Surely this is going to take a very long time?

It probably is, but for myself tomorrow wouldn't be a day to soon, so I want to do my bit right now. I have seen too many transgender friends living secret lives in misery and loneliness. How can I put it off any longer? Writing this booklet is one small attempt towards that end.

'Faith, Gender and Me' published by Elaine Sommers © 2008
Printed copies of this booklet or additional information can be obtained from
elainesommers007@yahoo.co.uk

APPENDIX

Biblical Perspectives and Transgender

Eunuchs. There are 3 passages in the Bible which refer to eunuchs and how they should be regarded. This could have relevance to the post-operative TS situation, people who have chosen castration as 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 these 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, hoping 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 feel 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 the various abominations are studied, I realised that no Christian I have ever met has ever upheld all these rules as being applicable to us now. So how can we know which of these ancient laws apply and which ones 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:

Reference	Subject	Commandment
Lev 7.18	Sacrificed food eaten on the third day	nil
Lev 11. 10,12	Eating swimming things with no fins or scales	nil
Lev 11.20	Eating winged insects	nil
Lev 11. 41, 42	Eating swarming things and things with many feet	nil
Lev 18.22 + 20.13	Lying with a male as with a woman (this raises the homosexual issue, which we are not dealing with in this study)	nil
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, including pigs and rabbits	nil
Deut 17. 1	Sacrificing a blemished animal	nil
Deut 18. 9	Child sacrifice, divination, soothsaying, augering, sorcery, charms, mediums, wizards, necromancy	1, 6
Deut 22. 5	Wearing clothes of the opposite sex	nil
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 lying tongue shedding innocent blood devising wicked plans running towards evil breathing out lies sowing discord	10? 9 6 6, 7, 8, 9, 10 6, 7, ,8, 9 10 9 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 10 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. Both are not 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 cross-dressing in the Bible. So why is it mentioned in this one place? Either, it is sinful and the Israelites were forbidden to do it for this reason, or else the practice was inextricably tied up with pagan practices which 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 obey 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 now, 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 to 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 may be because there were no transgender people in biblical times, as we have them now. History would suggest that this is unlikely as most societies and cultures through the ages have recognised such people in one form or another.

If Deut 22. 5 is now seen as a reference in the context of 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 own conclusion is that it does not.

One additional safeguard needs to be taken and that is the examination of conscience. Before God the transgender person needs to let God guide their thoughts and hearts over this matter. It is no good asking someone else to use their conscience on your behalf; it is a very personal matter. 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, by miraculous means, by counselling, or by suppression of transgender feelings.

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