

THE BATTLE FOR LIFE

Women in Combat: A Biblical Worldview - Part 1

“Women in combat” is a life issue. It is an issue to which God speaks.

Some say, “If men can do it, so can women.” Let us look for, shall we say, better ammunition to defend our Biblical worldview on this debate.

THE DEBATE GOES ON

Discussions of men and women in combat bring mixed reactions. Some people believe that women do not belong in combat because they do not have the physical capacity to endure the rigorous standards of training or the hardships of war. Some believe that it is a woman’s “right” to defend her country and that she can do so as well as any man. Besides, they insist, modern warfare seldom involves the physical force of front-line battle

Let’s put reason and logic to work: Consider the physical differences between men and women, such as their bone and muscle structures. Gender-integrated basic training undermines rigorous standards. But, this argument can be countered with examples of women who have developed body strength and can keep up with a man.

Consider the sexual attraction between men and women. Gender-integrated training and combat duty creates an environment in which men and women are vulnerable to sexual misconduct and abuse. But, this argument can be countered with practiced self-control.

This debate deserves more than opinion. It deserves more than a simple “it’s my right.” **To honor God and better serve society as a whole, which is the right question: *Can* women be in combat... or, *Should* women be in combat?**

REAL LIFE EXAMPLES

So, what are real soldiers saying? A classmate of my son served on board a ship in the Persian Gulf. In a conversation, this 21-year-old woman confessed a breakdown in respect for both women and men. Everything, she said, took on a “sexual connotation,” modesty was nearly “impossible,” and the rate of pregnancies on board ship was “higher than on shore assignment.”

Specialist Hollie Vallance was quoted in the *Dallas Morning News* (2-20-91) before being shipped to the Gulf War. She said, “I never really thought about going into combat. I never dreamed anything like this would happen in my lifetime, let alone right after I had my first child.” She continued. “I’ve built an ice wall around my heart to try to cool the pain, and sometimes I worry that [my husband and baby daughter] won’t be able to melt it away.”

In a commissioned survey of women in the Army, 79% of enlisted women and 71% of female noncommissioned officers said they wouldn't volunteer for combat. Only 10% of the female privates and corporals agreed with this statement: "I think that women should be treated exactly like men and serve in combat just like men." Less than one-quarter of mid-grade sergeants answered yes. (*The Washington Times*, 10-5-98).

A young husband and relative of mine serving in the Persian Gulf was forced to share his tent with a woman soldier. He told me "it was not a good situation any way you chose to look at it."

Pfc. Jessica Lynch and Army Specialist Shoshana Johnson returned home from the War in Iraq in the spring of 2003 as heroines. Although neither of them was technically in a combat position, they were, nonetheless, placed so close to the front line of battle that they were each captured by the enemy. After being rescued, it appeared that neither of them wanted to be "poster girls" for women in combat.

Is there wisdom in pretending that women are no different than men, placing them together in close quarters, lowering standards of physical endurance, and compromising training and military readiness? Should national defense be the proving ground for a particular group's ideology or desire for social change?

In the end, which matters most: How we feel about it... or what God says about it?

The Biblical argument that women should not engage in combat is expressed in the *ESV Study Bible* article on "War": "Most nations throughout history, and most Christians in every age, have held that fighting in combat is a responsibility that should fall only to men, and that it is contrary to the very idea of womanhood, and shameful for a nation, to have women risk their lives as combatants in a war." **For discussion, read Deuteronomy 3:18-19; Joshua 1:14; Jeremiah 50:37 and Nahum 3:13.** (Note: *The Lutheran Study Bible* commentary on "they shall become women" in Jeremiah 50:37 reads: "unskilled to fight; therefore, terrified.")

If we believe that women should not serve in combat, are we saying that they should not serve their country in the military? Explain your answer. Can a strong, effective military respect and utilize the abilities of women? If so, in what ways?

In Nehemiah 4, we learn that enemies threatened the people of God during the rebuilding of Jerusalem. They wanted to cause confusion and stop the good work. **Read specifically Nehemiah 4:13-14. What did the prophet say to the men (vs. 14)? Does this have meaning for you in our modern world? As enemies of God's people threaten home and family, is there wisdom in men and women serving in their God-given vocations of steward/defender of life and bearer/nurturer of life? For whose benefit? Sometimes, because we can, women imagine leaving what seems ordinary and common to excel away from home and, indeed, compete with men for glory. But who fills the void?**

If we resist women in combat, are we questioning their ability, or are we choosing to live within the boundaries of the created order for the benefit of civilization?

THE FIRST BATTLE FOR LIFE

God's order of creation speaks clearly to the issue of women on the front lines of battle. The first battle for life took place in a beautiful garden under the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. **Who was given the instructions for life and the warning against death (Genesis 2:15-17)?** Satan was well aware of God's order of creation. He knew that man was created as steward over all of creation and entrusted with the responsibility of defending life. But the enemy of life ignored man and chose woman as his target. He deceived the woman into thinking that God was holding something back from her, something that should rightfully be hers. She sinned when she failed to trust the Word of God. **The woman spoke for God, but what else did she do? Compare Genesis 3:1-3 with Genesis 2:17.** It is often said that whenever we speak what God has not, trouble brews. **Do you agree or disagree?** This is called spiritualizing or thinking ourselves godlike. Note the progress of temptation: 1) doubt of God's Word, 2) rejection of God's Word, and 3) effort to establish our own standard of right and wrong.

Sin did not enter the world when Eve disobeyed God. **What does Genesis 3:6-7 tell us? Who did God hold accountable (Genesis 3:8-9)? What light does this shed on military readiness and national defense?**

Death had its first victory, but the war was not over. The enemy of life may have celebrated his successful deception of Eve and assaulted Adam's leadership, but Satan did not have the final word. **Read Genesis 3:20.** Eve (Hebrew: chawwah) means "life." **Do you find significance in the fact that this name was bestowed upon woman after sin brought death into the world?** With this name, Adam expressed hope for the future through the promised Seed of the woman who is Jesus Christ, the Savior of the world. Satan's plan was for evil, but it was God's plan for Eve to become the mother of every living person. **What does this say to you?**

Dear Father God, You are the Creator and Redeemer of human life. Please give us wisdom and discernment to know how to bear and defend life in ways that honor Your created order. We pray in Jesus' name and for the sake of generations to come. AMEN.

This four-part study written by Linda Bartlett is adapted from a larger collection of studies entitled *Men, Women and Relationships* first published in 1999 and revised in 2004 (www.lutheransforlife.org)