



Amazonomachia: Fight Between Greek Warriors & Amazons by unknown sculptor, circa 160 – 170 AD. Vatican Museums.
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SOUTHERN BAPTISTS, GENDER IDEOLOGY, & FEMALE COMBATANTS

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In one world, Southern Baptists have a reputation for cultural conservatism reminiscent of 1950s America. In another world, Facebook offers over fifty choices of gender identities for its users to choose from. Is cultural conservatism enough to withstand the tide of proliferating gender ideologies like those seen on Facebook? Are cultural niceties accompanied with chivalry and genteel decorum, while mannerly and preferred, capable of withstanding the gender ideology of today's social justice warriors? I would contend that cultural conservatism, or convention, is not enough to prevent additional gender identity splintering. Only a robust biblical vision for manhood and womanhood can attempt to offset the wreckage of tampering with nature.



Southern Baptists are a confessional religious body, meaning that our dictates and directives issue from the authority of Holy Scripture. So opposition to today's gender wars cannot be met simply by tradition or chivalry, but from Scripture.

A denomination predominately located in America's geographic South (but expanding in all parts of the country), Southern Baptist's evangelical biblicism has made America's largest protestant denomination stalwart critics of ideologies that attempt to override innate differences between men and women.

Suspicion of egalitarianism has taken many forms in Southern Baptist life. Most notoriously, in the years of the Conservative Resurgence, egalitarianism and feminism were indistinguishable, which took the form of support for female ordination. This, and other issues at the time such as the exclusivity of Christ for obtaining salvation, were key dividing lines in the recovery of biblical inerrancy throughout the denomination and its seminaries.

Today, Southern Baptists find themselves at odds with gender ideologies that attempt to erase distinctions between the sexes or that, as in the transgender phenomenon, decouple sex and gender altogether. From the Southern Baptist Convention's *Baptist Faith and Message*, which explicitly adopted a complementarian¹ view for family life, to the 2014 Southern Baptist resolution "On Transgender Identity,"² Southern Baptists have been outspoken critics of egalitarianism and gender ideology.

Most recently, Southern Baptists find themselves amidst new controversy surrounding female combatants³ and the stated support by military officials of possibly requiring women to register for Selective Service.⁴

Though such a challenge seemed inevitable in our progressive age, the precipitating event was the fateful pronouncement in December 2015 that all U.S. military combat roles, without exception, would be opened to women. That statement, issued by Secretary of Defense

Ashton Carter, ignited speculation about the prudence of mandating women to register for the draft. In the intervening months, there has been endless discussion concerning the religious and moral considerations bound up in such an act. Southern Baptist sentiment remains resolute: Women should not now—or ever—be made combatants or forced into military conscription.⁵

Southern Baptist leaders resoundingly condemned these proposals. "It is no shock that a secular society that has embraced feminism and transgender ideology is now confused about gender roles and war," Owen Strachan, president of the Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood, told *Baptist Press*, the news agency of the Southern Baptist Convention.⁶ Strachan, a noted young complementarian, is also a professor of Christian theology at Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Kansas City. Popular Southern Baptist blogger and academic Denny Burk said that women in combat represents the "undoing of

civilization.”⁷ Albert Mohler, president of The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary remarked on his podcast, *The Briefing*, that such announcements are the result of a secular worldview working itself out consistently:

In the larger society, operating from a secular worldview, there is likely to be a great discomfort with this announcement and with the inevitability of the fact that there is now no compelling argument against registering young women for the draft. But increasingly, denying that there is any basic difference between men and women, that secular worldview has forfeited any ability to say that this is wrong, only that there is some kind of cultural distaste for it.⁸

Finally, while still on the campaign trail, Southern Baptist presidential candidate Ted Cruz called the proposal to draft women “nuts.”⁹

Southern Baptist opposition to female combatants is grounded



in two main objections. First, Southern Baptists have an intuitive objection to the idea of female combatants grounded in a biblical vision of natural law in Genesis 1-2 and modeled from the Christ-Church relationship in Ephesians 5. Secondly, opposition is grounded in a larger battle against a sweeping cultural egalitarianism based on gender ideology at odds with Southern Baptist views on biblical complementarity.

But as far back as 1998, the Southern Baptist Convention passed a resolution against women in combat.¹⁰ Authored by Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary ethicist and military veteran Daniel Heimbach, the resolution’s protest against female combatants was grounded in a theological vision for biblical complementarity. According to the resolution:



• God created male and female with specific and complementary characteristics (Genesis 1:27), declaring them “good” (Genesis 1:31) so that male and female in relationship constitute a complete

expression of the divine order for humanity, yet without blurring or denying the meaning or significance of gender-based distinctions established by God in the created order.

- The equality of male and female as to dignity and worth, following from their creation in the image of God (Genesis 1:27), is fully consistent with gender-based distinctions as to roles and responsibilities which are also established in the created order.
- God, by creating Adam first (Genesis 2:18; 1 Corinthians



11:8) and also by creating woman “an help meet for him” (Genesis 2:18, 20, 22; 1 Corinthians 11:9), has set the gender-based role and responsibility of males in the most basic unit of society (the family) to be that of leader, provider, and self-sacrificial protector (also cf. Ephesians 5:25; 1 Peter 3:7), and likewise has set the gender-based role and responsibility of females to be that of help and nurturer (Genesis 2:18) and life-giving

(Genesis 3:20) under male leadership and protection (1 Peter 3:7).

The resolution would also acknowledge the biblical pattern of male combatants as the normative ethic for military conflict grounded in theological anthropology:

- The moral justification for combat service is the duty to protect and defend vital national interests, including the welfare, security, and good order of families,



whose justification is essentially linked to the divinely assigned role and responsibilities of self-sacrificial male headship of the family (Ephesians 5:23-24).

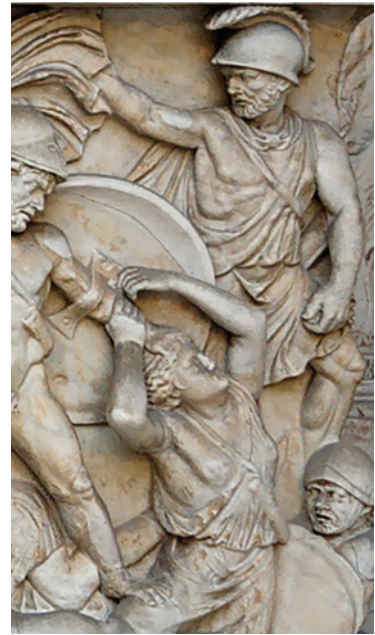
- The pattern established by God throughout the Bible is that men, not women, bear responsibility to serve in combat if war is necessary (Genesis 14:14; Numbers 31:3, 21, 49; Deuteronomy 20:5-9; 3:14; Joshua 1:14-18; 6:3, 7, 9; 8:3; 10:7; 1 Samuel 16:18; 18:5; 2 Samuel 11:1; 17:8; 23:8-39; Psalm 45:3-5; Song of Solomon 3:7-8; Isaiah 42:13).

- Biblical examples that record women serving in combat (Judges 4:4-23) are presented as contrary to proper and normal gender-based distinctions, and result from a shameful failure of male leadership (Judges 4:9-10; Nahum 3:13).



Finally, the resolution also expressed solemn disapproval of proposals to equip women for combat around five key concerns:

- Willful rejection of a gender-based role distinction that limits combat military service to males is a foolish social experiment that: (1) threatens good military order and discipline by unnecessarily escalating sexual tensions among combat warriors, (2) weakens unit cohesion, (3) exposes female warriors taken as POWs to the special trauma of rape and sexual abuse, (4) places a major new strain on marital fidelity, and (5) risks the nation's military security by scrambling the moral framework defining male/female relationships.



The above information indicates that Southern Baptist opposition to women in combat is grounded in the convention's confession, the *Baptist Faith and Message 2000* (BFM), whose biblical vision for male and female complementarity places man in the role of provider and protector—roles grounded in nature, not convention. The BFM states that:

The husband and wife are of equal worth before God, since both are created in God's image. The marriage relationship models the way God relates to His people. A husband is to love his wife as Christ loved the church. He has the God-given responsibility to provide for, to protect, and to lead his family. A wife is to submit herself graciously to the servant leadership of her husband even as the church willingly submits to the headship of Christ. She, being in the image of God as is her husband and thus equal to him, has the God-given responsibility

to respect her husband and to serve as his helper in managing the household and nurturing the next generation.¹¹

Under the pretenses of patriotism and equality, Americans are being confronted with a moral dilemma. As the American people now contend with the morality of forcing women to register for Selective Service—the draft—a larger question looms over the discussion. Will American society forever dismiss the distinction between male and female?

There is no valor in requiring a woman to be subjected to the brutalities of a wartime foxhole where unimaginable horrors are played out in real life. For the same reason, there is no need to forcibly compel women into military service or make them combatants. Should the day arrive when the U.S. military was dependent upon female combatants to win a war, the United States would have already lost its most important battles. A nation relying on female combatants has been brought to its knees by political correctness and has lost all trappings of male and female differentiation. It is a nation denying creation and reality in favor of anti-creation and anti-reality.

The logic and consequence of drafting women leads down a path that should cause our consciences to shudder. Think of the moral equivalency of such arguments that would make it the duty of wives to respond to midnight intruders, rather than husbands. That is exactly what those in favor of drafting women are asking us to accept. And it isn't just a military proposal; it's about a dangerous and ever-evolving worldview built on the absolutizing ideology of egalitarianism.

The cultural ethos behind this proposal carries inestimable consequences for our society's understanding of sex and gender. As evangelicals, Southern Baptists unapologetically affirm God's complementary design and purpose for men and women. While men and women are fully equal in essence, worth, and dignity, the burden of protection is squarely placed upon men. Southern Baptists firmly reject policy measures which ask men to acquiesce to a culture of emasculation by surrendering their innate gifting and responsibility. Such proposals reaffirm our culture's enfeebled understanding of masculinity, making male obligation optional if women are willing to undertake the duties of men.

Egalitarianism is pervasive in our culture. It has largely rendered the recognition of apparent differences between men and women as antiquated misogyny. Yet, the truth is undeterred. Nature continues to testify to the beauty and distinctness of the sexes. And by design, men and women continue to manifest and display both physical and emotional qualities which clarify the follies of female conscription.

So let it be said that a regime that depends on female combatants obscures reality, ignores history, and shames our American legacy. No amount of "progress" or modern notions of equality will convince Southern Baptists that placing women in combat is a good idea. Because it isn't. It's barbaric.

All of this is undergirded by Christian ethics. At the very beginning of the Christian Scriptures, we're presented with a story of creation. The pinnacle of creation is God's creation of men and women. God didn't

make us automata. He didn't make us asexual monads. He made us gendered, embodied, and *different*. Those differences extend to all levels of our being—our emotional, physical, and psychological selves—and this is intentional and good. The Christian tradition finds these differences beautiful, and we embrace them with glad acceptance. God made men and women fit for complementary roles and tasks that, when exchanged or blurred, represent a sort of de-creation. Romans teaches us that disavowing creation is its own form of judgment. A nation cannot suppress the natural laws of God and expect to prosper in the long-term, much less in armed conflict.

The biblical tradition testifies that man and woman are made beautifully different for purposeful reasons. The broad shoulders of men aren't ancillary or accidental features, but evidence of the natural strength that males innately possess. The protective instinct that men can harness at a moment's notice isn't an evolutionary instinct passed down from marauding cavemen—it issues from the fact that God made men protectors.

Military conscription of women makes the thwarting of nature mandatory. Women are nurturers, not warriors. That women possess, on average, a smaller frame than men indicates their aptness for less rugged activities, and not hand-to-hand combat. Noting that women cannot comparably handle the physical strain of soldiering isn't to deny their intrinsic worth and dignity, but actually esteems it as something distinct from, but *equal* to, a man's. And incidentally, it underscores the diversity supposedly favored by cultural progressives.

The Apostle Paul tells the Corinthians to “act like men,” which assumes that if men are to act like men, there’s a standard by which manliness is measured (1 Corinthians 16:13). This is why the Bible, the same Bible which provided America with a rich moral ethos, considers it cowardly, shameful, and embarrassing for men to allow women to engage in a sphere for which men are best suited (Judges 4:9). Nations should always be reluctant to undertake military action, but God forbid, if wars arise, it ought to be sons that do the nation’s bidding. Nature continues to bear faithful witness to the truth, and so shall we. America may fall prey to foolish ideologies placing women in harm’s way, but not without strong Southern Baptist objection or opposition.

Southern Baptists are not alone in their intuitive revulsion at the idea of female combatants. The editors of the conservative periodical *National Review* editorialized against such proposals, echoing the theme of natural law that Southern Baptists also draw from: “Such a policy inverts natural law and the rules that have grounded our civilization for thousands of years.” They went on: “Men should protect women. They should not shelter behind mothers and daughters. Indeed, we see this reality every time there is a mass shooting. Boyfriends throw themselves over girlfriends, and even strangers and acquaintances often give themselves up to save the woman closest to them.”¹²

When I spoke with Russell Moore, president of the Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission, and the Southern Baptist Convention’s chief political and ethical spokesman, he told me:

The only way that a society can get to the idea of women in combat is by erasing any understanding of differences between the sexes. In every civilization in human history, men have been trained to be warriors and to protect the women. Having women in combat not only jeopardizes national security by not taking into account the very real differences physically, between men and women, but it also puts men in dangerous situations because there’s a natural created drive to protect women. To deny them this opportunity is to eviscerate the very concept of masculinity.¹³

Moore objected to the claim that arguments against female combatants are grounded merely in convention, insisting that the use of male combatants is rooted in nature. “Every human civilization has made the distinction between men and women. Why? Because that distinction is rooted in human biology.” P

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Endnotes

1 For an articulation of Biblical Complementarianism, see the Council for Biblical Womanhood’s (CBMW) “Danvers Statement,” available at: <http://cbmw.org/uncategorized/the-danvers-statement/>.

2 “On Transgender Identity,” Southern Baptist Convention Resolution, Baltimore, Maryland, 2014. Available at: <http://www.sbc.net/resolutions/2250/on-transgender-identity>. Full disclosure: I was a primary co-author alongside Southern Baptist scholar Denny Burk of the resolution.

3 Matthew Rosenberg and Dave Philipps, “All Combat Roles Now Open to Women, Defense Secretary Says,” *The New York Times*, December 3, 2015,

<http://www.nytimes.com/2015/12/04/us/politics/combat-military-women-ash-carter.html>.

4 Dan Lamothe, “Army and Marine Corps Chiefs: It’s Time for Women to Register for the Draft,” *The Washington Post*, February 2, 2016, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/checkpoint/wp/2016/02/02/army-and-marine-corps-chiefs-its-time-for-women-to-register-for-the-draft/>, “ISSN”: “0190-8286”, “short-title”: “Army and Marine Corps chiefs”, “language”: “en-US”, “author”: {“family”: “Lamothe”, “given”: “Dan”}, “issued”: {“date-parts”: [[“2016”, “2”, “2”]]}, “accessed”: {“date-parts”: [[“2016”, “3”, “31”]]}}, “schema”: “https://github.com/citation-style-language/schema/raw/master/csl-citation.json”}

5 Criticism of women in combat naturally leads many to then question whether Israel, considered an ally of both the democratic west and evangelicals, are likewise erring as grievously as this article would suggest. Israel, it should be noted, has more restrictions for women in the IDF than what has been proposed by the Pentagon. For more on the differences between Israel’s use of female combatants, and the proposal by the United States military, see David French, *Stop Using Israel’s Example to Justify the Barbaric Practice of Drafting Women into Combat*, *National Review*, 2016, <http://www.nationalreview.com/article/431239/israel-women-combat-experience-not-what-left-says>.

6 David Roach, “Women in Combat: DOD Change Spurs Debate,” *Baptist Press*, December 9, 2015, <http://www.bpnews.net/45978/women-in-combat-dod-change-spurs-debate>.

7 Denny Burk, “Women in Combat and the Undoing of Civilization,” *Denny Burk*, December 4, 2015, <http://www.dennyburk.com/women-in-combat-and-the-undoing-of-civilization-2/>.

8 Albert Mohler, *The Briefing*, Albert-Mohler.com, February 3, 2016, <http://www.albertmohler.com/2016/02/03/the-briefing-02-03-16/>.

9 Katie Glueck, “Cruz: Drafting Women Is ‘Nuts,’” *POLITICO*, February 7, 2016, <http://www.politico.com/blogs/new-hampshire-primary-2016-live-updates/2016/02/ted-cruz-women-military-draft-new-hampshire-218910>.

10 “On Women in Combat,” Southern Baptist Convention Resolution, Salt Lake City, Utah, 1998. Available at: <http://www.sbc.net/resolutions/1089/resolution-on-women-in-combat>

11 Baptist Faith and Message 2000, <http://www.sbc.net/bfm2000/bfm2000.asp>.

12 The Editors, “Only a Barbaric Nation Drafts Its Mothers and Daughters into Combat,” *National Review Online*, February 9, 2016, <http://www.nationalreview.com/article/431002/women-combat-selective-service-national-law>

13 Personal correspondence.