

## Christian Women Considering the Military

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April 5, 2016

The author would like to thank Douglas Lee (Army Chaplain Brigadier General, retired) and the commissioners of the Presbyterian and Reformed Commission on Chaplains and Military Personnel for their enthusiastic interest when discussing a previous draft at their meeting in March 2016. I also thank Robert Miller (Navy Air Captain, retired) and the board of Hope for America, and Nancy Lee (Faculty member, Belhaven High Scholars program) for their comments. This document can be freely distributed in any form, provided that it is distributed in full with no additions or deletions, and without charge. Written exceptions to this free distribution policy including permission for print publication for sale can be requested from the author.

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## Christian Women Considering the Military

The laws of many countries today, including the United States, allow Christian young women to join the military. These women, their parents, their pastors, and their other advisors often believe that military experience has important advantages. It might help a woman to develop discipline and positive values, pay for college, receive veterans' benefits, develop career skills, and serve her country. Joining the military indeed has many benefits, but the values that women learn and the situations they face in the military have changed in important ways.

Recent changes in U.S. government policies about the military raise new moral questions. These changes especially affect women and parents who agree that the Bible provides the best guide for their beliefs and decisions. Although many military policies have changed, this booklet is mainly about the policy to increase the use of women for combat duties and in combat areas. This change raises questions that even Christians who were in the military a few years ago might not expect. Young women need to think about this and other changes *before* getting into any military program for children or students, and especially before taking an oath to join the military. Because of the way that the military promotes slow increases in commitment over time, military programs are not like clubs or sports where someone can try it out, find out more as they get involved, and see if they like it.

I began to think carefully about the new government policies when two very close high school age friends of mine, first a girl and later a boy, started thinking about military careers. While I never have been in the military myself, I had told these friends about projects that I have done for the U.S. military and some of its allies during the past 30 years. As a professor, I once helped to change the way that the military academies choose cadets. For several years, I helped to teach Ph.D. students to become professors at West Point and researchers in the Army. I also once lectured to all of the Brigadier Generals and Major Generals in the Army.

Whenever I am asked to do a military project, I think and pray about whether the government is then using the military in the right way. As I always have done for myself, I took a fresh look at military policies today so that I could advise my young friends.

As I looked into recent U.S. military policies, I heard serious concerns from senior Bible-believing military chaplains (mostly retired chaplain Colonels and Generals), military officers and Christian seminary professors who train pastors. Their main concern is that women are now being trained to use military weapons, sent into combat areas, and used in combat much more than before. These advisors of mine had carefully checked what the Bible teaches, and had come to believe that it is not right to prepare and use women to fight. The senior chaplains told me that they are hearing from many other chaplains about new problems that Christians in the military are facing because of this policy change. I found that most of what is written about women in the military is written in a very careful, technical way for professors and people who make military policies. I also found that most pastors, elders, and even many seminary professors know very little about their church group's position or about recent changes in military policies.

The military chaplains who have been advising me are very busy helping people in the military, and the seminary professors are busy teaching and working on church policies. Several of them thought that I should help by explaining the challenges that Bible-believing women in the military are now facing, so that Christian women would better know what it is really like to join the military. For this reason, I am mainly writing here for Bible-believing Christian young women in high school and college who are

thinking about joining the military, and for Christian parents, pastors, youth leaders and Christian school counsellors.

The ideas here about what the Scripture teaches about women in the military summarize studies by the leaders of Bible-believing Presbyterian, Reformed, and Baptist churches that were approved at their national meetings. The Presbyterian and Reformed Commission on Chaplains and Military Personnel supervises most of these churches, while the chaplains of the Southern Baptist Convention are supervised by another group.<sup>1</sup> The first time that I refer to one of these groups of church leaders, I include a footnote about where on the internet to find their study. In this booklet, when I refer to “church leaders” I will mean the leaders of these church groups.

### ***Basic Issues of War***

One issue that Christian women should think about is the basic issue of whether a country goes to war in the way that it should. This is sometimes called the *just war* question. The Presbyterian Church in America did a study about this question called “Christian Responsibility in a Nuclear Age.”<sup>2</sup> The just war question has two parts. One part is *why* a country goes to war, and the other is *how* a country goes to war.

When government leaders use the military for the right reasons and in the right way, they can help to control some of the greatest evil that happens in the world. The Bible-believing Presbyterian, Reformed and Baptist churches whose ideas I am writing about do not take the pacifist view that going to war is always wrong. Instead, they look to the Scripture to think about the specific times when war is needed to protect innocent people.

Knowing *why* a country goes to war is not always easy and Christians sometimes do not realize when their government is going to war without a good reason. For example, many young people in Germany had the support of their Christian parents to go to war for Nazi Germany during World War II when their government was doing great harm.<sup>3</sup> After WWII started in Europe, Christians argued with one another about whether or not the United States should also enter the war. Later when the United States joined the war, many Christians fought to protect the world from Nazi Germany. Since knowing whether a country goes to war for the right reasons can be hard, Bible-believing Christians in countries that are at war with one another sometimes end up killing each other.

Since WWII, Christians in the United States often have talked about whether or not the U.S. military should be part of many wars. Sadly, war is still sometimes necessary. Christian communities often need to openly and calmly discuss whether or not going to war is the right thing to do. Christian young people who are thinking about joining the military can talk with their parents and church leaders for help in thinking about why their country might be considering going to war.

Before joining the military, Christians also need to think about *how* their country’s military acts when it goes to war. One question, for example, is whether the military is careful to fight against enemy soldiers rather than innocent people who are not fighting. In recent wars, this question has been very difficult because the enemy is often close to civilian areas. Another question that has become important for Christians is how soldiers are treated by other soldiers and by their superiors if they refuse to obey ungodly orders. Talking with a church group’s military chaplains is one way to get information about how the military acts when it goes to war. Whether women are being used to fight is the just war question of how the military goes to war that I will discuss here.

When a government uses its military as it should, then Christians need to seriously think about helping their country's military.

### ***Government Policies about Women in the Military***

On December 2, 2015, the Secretary of the Department of Defense announced that the military would use more women than ever to fight wars. For Christians, this new policy raises questions about whether the military goes to war in the right way. This new policy has a long history<sup>4</sup>. As long as there have been wars, women have been nearby to care for fighting men. For example, the U.S. Army Nurse Corp that was mainly made up of women, was created by the Army Reorganization Act over one hundred years ago in 1901.

Until the 1970s, the U.S. military tried to keep women who were helping in these ways out of combat areas. For example, the United States passed the Women's Armed Services Act in 1948 to increase the number of women in military support roles, but to protect these women from danger. Still, the areas where men were fighting sometimes changed, and women might then be in danger and need to fight.

**Recent policy changes.** The use of women in combat has increased over the years. Some big changes happened when the U.S. military went to war in Afghanistan and Iraq after 2001. Unlike the first war in Iraq in 1990 and all earlier wars in U.S. history, President George W. Bush's administration greatly increased the number of women who were sent into combat. Even though military laws and policies said that women could not be assigned to combat units, commanders were allowed to attach women to combat units for short times. Over 700 women were wounded and over 150 women died in the Afghanistan and Iraq wars, many more than in earlier wars.<sup>5</sup> The number of people who women killed while in combat are not reported.

The new policy that President Obama's administration announced in December 2015 is that women who want to be in military support roles will no longer be protected, but will be given the same combat duties as men. The military will use the same criteria to send women into combat areas that are used for men. For some duties in combat areas, women do not need to be as strong as most men. For other combat duties, everyone must be equally strong. The military has been looking into how strong people really need to be for different duties, so these criteria have been changing. Some elite groups like the Navy Seals are only for people who want to be sent into combat. Christian women, however, need to know that the criteria for sending women into combat areas and into direct combat do not include whether or not they want to be sent.

Why this change in policy? The reasons for sending more women into combat are complicated, but some main parts are clear. Having more women in both combat and non-combat roles is part of a larger program to increase the number of people from diverse minority groups in the military. One big step was the decision by the United States Congress to create the Military Leadership Diversity Commission (MLDC) in 2009.<sup>6</sup> Its reports described steps that the government should take to increase the use of women for combat.

One reason for sending more women into combat is that the MLDC said that doing this would increase the number of women who could become Generals and Admirals. Combat is at the center of what the military does, and combat roles are important for promotions to the most influential military

positions. Women who already had been attached to combat units wanted to be promoted to these important military roles. Many of them felt, though, that they were not getting enough credit for their combat duties when promotion decisions were made.

The MLDC's plan was important, but the government's decision would have been much harder if people in the United States had been strongly against having women fight wars. The new policies also have happened because technology, values and combat situations have slowly changed what many people in the United States believe about the role of women in the military and in society.

**Technology changes.** Technology changes have made many kinds of physical work easier to do both in the military and outside it. Household work like washing clothes and cleaning house has become less demanding. Many jobs outside the home are not as hard as they once were. The military has changed the controls of artillery, armored vehicles, tanks, ships and airplanes, so that more women than before can use them.

Another technology change has been to make birth control easier. While pregnant women are still not allowed to stay on military ships or have combat duties,<sup>7</sup> birth control methods are now easy to use. Birth control makes it possible for women to stay in those military roles where it is not possible to protect pregnant women and young children. If other birth control methods fail and military women become pregnant while in these roles, they can go to a private hospital or clinic to have an abortion, although military pregnancy policies are designed to provide other ways to handle unexpected pregnancies. Changing current policy so that military doctors would perform abortions someday might fit with the increased number of women who have combat duties.

**Value changes.** Values and beliefs about women have also changed, partly because of new technology. Some of these changes are very good. Women have more legal rights and are better protected by their government than they once were. As I will discuss in the section about *Biblical Christian Beliefs*, women also are now less often kept from doing jobs that they should be able to do (Proverbs 31: 10-31).

Other value changes about women, though, raise questions for Christians. Many movies and TV programs show women fighting in combat, for example. When Christians think about the military, they need to take care that the media may be slowly follow the world by getting us to accept changes in values that are against our faith (Exodus 23:2). Ordinary jobs are different from combat roles, and Hollywood fantasies are different from real life. Changes that support women to do useful work and that protect women from being treated poorly have been good. As discussed in the section about *Biblical Christian Beliefs*, however, the leaders of the Bible-believing churches explain why sending women into combat harms rather than helps women.

Apart from changes in values that develop and spread slowly, U.S. government leaders sometimes create or cooperate in programs to try to change values. These include the education programs in public schools. The U.S. government supports many programs to get people to support military policies. These include programs for girls and young women to visit ships, military planes, and bases.<sup>8</sup> TV recruiting advertisements often show women in combat roles. Military recruiters try to increase applications from women. The Junior Reserve Officer Training Corp (JROTC) programs in many high schools encourage girls to consider taking combat roles in the military. In my home town, middle school students often join a JROTC program for the reward of attending a better high school. Recruiting

girls for JROTC programs begins in middle school. The U.S. military Academies use one-week summer programs for students after their junior year of high school to attract cadets.

All these programs are designed to increase the support for the military and for current government policies, including sending women into combat. Some of them, especially the Academy programs, connect young women who attend the programs both with other women in the programs and with adults. Later, these people stay in touch through the internet. These adults and new friends often encourage the young women to attend the Academies, to accept the view that women should be sent into combat, and to seek military careers.

**Military culture changes.** Support by people in the military for sending women into combat has slowly increased because of changes in technology and values. Also, the MLDC described steps that the military can take to increase this support by changing the values of people who are already in the military. For example, people who are already in the military should show their complete support for sending women into combat if they want to be promoted. Both talking about and actively showing support for sending women into combat helps men and women in the military to receive excellent evaluations. Orders to fully support sending women into combat are different from most other military orders. Most other orders only tell people what to do, not what to think. For several years now, officers who do not support the new policies about women often have either left the military or not been promoted to higher ranks. As a result, more and more senior military leaders fully support sending women into combat.

The MLDC reports suggest that military combat roles are the same as civilian jobs and careers, and argue that the reasons for making it easier for women to have civilian jobs should apply in the military. Military roles, however, are very different from civilian jobs. One difference is that the oath that a person takes when joining the military often makes a military role hard to leave. A second difference is that although a woman in the military can ask for particular duties or a place to live, she may or may not be given what she asks. A third difference is that women agree to let the military change their values and beliefs, especially about killing people who the U.S. government says are the enemy. A fourth difference has to do with handling pregnancy, abortion, and child care. Choices about all of these things can be difficult for women with civilian jobs, but they are much more difficult for women who join the military.

**Combat changes.** It has never been possible to completely separate combat from non-combat areas, but it has become even more difficult in recent decades. For example, nursing facilities where many women worked during WWI and WWII were located in areas that were as far as possible from combat areas. Also in those wars, the enemy usually did not try to attack places for doctors, nurses and other people doing support work who were not fighters. Even in those wars, though, combat sometimes moved into areas where doctors and nurses worked. In the Vietnam war, enemy fighters did not always wear uniforms, but sometimes dressed like civilians and fighting often happened outside of clear combat areas.

It has become harder and harder to separate combat from non-combat areas in the recent wars in the Middle East and in wars on terrorism. The Reformed Presbyterian Church thought about the problem of separating combat from non-combat situations. In their General Assembly in 2004 they write: “. . . we maintain that the current Global War on Terrorism has forever blurred the distinction between combat and combat support units. Thus, women regardless of service component or unit affiliation are routinely engaged in active combat and as a result have been wounded or killed.

Therefore, we maintain that women are not to serve in combat roles, especially in fields of deployment where combat zones include the total land areas in which terrorist activities are being conducted and every soldier is placed in immediate danger."<sup>9</sup> Some groups of church leaders thought that the military could still send women into less dangerous areas if it wanted to do so. The change in military policies about women, however, are very clear that the military no longer tries to put women in safer areas than men.

**Summary of changes.** Changes in technology and values both in society in general and in the military have reduced the interest of government and military leaders in protecting military women. Changes have slowly happened in society for many reasons. The U.S. government has taken steps to change values in both society and in the military. Together, these changes have led to changes in military policy about women. The proposal to open all combat positions to women was announced in the MLDC's final report in 2011 and is now fully in place in 2016. The changes include increasing programs to encourage interest in the military by children from kindergarten through high school, so parents need to know about them.

When women join the military today, they agree to accept any legal orders.<sup>10</sup> During their time in the military, women in all military specialties are very likely to be taught to kill and ordered into combat areas where they can be attacked by an enemy. They can also be ordered into direct combat. Many military programs are popular with Christian students and parents who strongly support the United States government. Symbols like the American flag, the eagle, and patriotic songs and military slogans can be misused to get Christian students and parents to support new military policies about women without thinking about them. Military policies and military values are changing quickly. These changes raise questions about whether the government today is still using the military in the way that people in the military deserve to be used. Bible-believing Christians now need to think more carefully than ever about whether girls and young women should be part of military programs.

### ***Biblical Christian Beliefs about Women, Men and Combat***

Based on the views of Bible-believing church leaders (see Note 1), recent policy changes make it very difficult for a Christian woman to join the military to help in support roles in the way that once was possible. The concerns that my military chaplain and theology advisors have about sending women into combat are not outdated, emotional responses to the changes in military policy. They are based on careful discussions by leaders of several church groups about what the Scripture teaches. These Bible-believing Presbyterian, Reformed, and Baptist church groups agree that women should not go into combat. Their discussions were led by military chaplains, people who have been military officers, seminary professors, and other church leaders. The ideas and verses of Scripture in this section about *Biblical Christian Beliefs* summarize studies by this and other groups of church leaders.<sup>11</sup> Their studies mentioned here in the reference notes are very complete and provide good resources for anyone who has questions about my summaries.

**Starting in the Garden of Eden.** Starting with the Garden of Eden takes us back to the very close relationships that God first had with the people He created and that the first two people had with one another. He did not create a man and a woman at the same time. Even before they sinned, he did not give them the same duties. He created Adam first and spoke with him first. He created Eve to be Adam's helper. When He first told people what they should and should not do, He did not speak to Adam and Eve at the same time. Instead, He spoke to Adam first so that Adam could explain His commands to Eve.

The duty of woman to help man was not the result of sin. It was part of how men and women were created to relate to each other in a world without sin.

Never does the Bible say that the sin of either the man or the woman was worse than the sin of the other. The sin of each one separated them from God. For both men and women, being saved from sin and being closer to God again happens when they have faith in Christ. The Bible does say, though, that men and women differ in one important way in how they face sin. In 1 Timothy 2: 11-14, the Apostle Paul reminds us of Genesis when he tells us how men and women work together to face sin. He tells us that the woman was tempted by Satan when she spoke to him herself without being protected by the man. She sinned by being misled by Satan, by not doing what God had told her to do through Adam.

**Mighty men.** After the garden of Eden, the Bible always shows that it is the duty of men to join together to protect women and family. This is the reason for the title of the study called *Man's Duty to Protect Women* by the leaders of the Presbyterian Church in America. This church: "... declares it to be the biblical duty of man to defend woman and therefore condemns the use of women as military combatants ..."<sup>12</sup> The Bible-believing churches that I refer to here all take this same view for several reasons.

When Israel fights wars in the Old Testament, it is men and not women who have the duty to fight. Nehemiah gives a very clear message about this duty when he tells the men of Israel to "fight for your wives and your homes" (Neh. 4:14). Many other parts of the Old Testament say that men join the military when God commands war against evil. The Old Testament language about warriors is always male (Isaiah 42:13; Jeremiah 51:30); fighters are *mighty men*.

The calling of men to join the military when fighting is needed is found in all parts of the Old Testament. For example, one of the first times that the Old Testament describes war is when Abraham takes men to rescue his nephew Lot who had been captured (Gen. 13: 14-16). Deuteronomy 22: 5 says that it is a terrible thing for women to put on military clothing and take up the tools of war. In the book of Numbers, the people who are being counted are the men ages 20 and over who are old enough to go to war (Numbers 1: 24; 1:44-46). The Kings Saul, David, and Solomon all had armies of men (I Sam. 11: 7-8; I Sam. 23:15; I Kings 9:21, 22; I Kings 12: 21). Because they were armies of men, only men and not women were killed in battle (I Sam. 4: 1-2, 10; 2 Chron. 13:17). Some men in some specific situations, like men who had recently gotten married, were not supposed to go to war (Deut. 20:5-8; 24:5; Judg. 7:3). Reasons that someone should not go to war are only given for men and not for women. For example, the Scripture never says that women who had recently gotten married should not go to war, since women were *never* to go to war.

These are just examples. The study by the Reformed Church in the United States gives a very complete list of parts of Scripture which show that it is always men who are called to war. It: "find(s) no biblical warrant for women serving in enforced military service, but on the contrary, finds that women are to be protected from enforced military service that they might fulfill their calling and duties under God as set forth in the order of creation. Further, women are not to serve in combat roles."<sup>13</sup>

The New Testament does not give any examples of specific times when God's people are called to war. It only gives examples of soldiers of Herod, the Jewish ruler of the Roman province that included Israel, and soldiers of the Roman emperor. In New Testament times, soldiers had both the duties of



being police and of fighting wars. Some continued to be soldiers after coming to faith in Christ (Matt. 8: 5-10; Luke 3:14; Acts 10: 1-8). **The soldiers mentioned in the New Testament were all men.**

**Deborah and Jael.** Sometimes Christians use two examples of Old Testament women, Deborah and Jael, to say that women have a place in combat. Deborah was a prophetess who was called a *mother in Israel*. The general, Barak, refused to take the army into battle as the Lord had commanded (Judges 4: 6-8). Instead, Barak told Deborah that she had to come with him. **Although she went with Barak the way a mother might go with a weak son, the Lord said that Barak's refusal to lead without Deborah brought shame on him (Judges 4-5).**

The other woman, Jael, killed an enemy leader (Judges 4: 20-22) who came into her tent after the battle with Barak's army had ended. **She killed him with household equipment, a tent stake, not with military weapons.** Women sometimes need to defend their home when an enemy gets past the mighty men, but the Bible does not describe either Deborah or Jael as soldiers.

**Duties of men and women.** **The special duty of men to risk their lives to defend women is one example of the differences between the duties of men and women.** The Scripture says that some of the duties of women and men differ in the family (Gen. 2: 15-25; Eph. 5: 21-33) and in the church (1 Tim. 2: 8-16). Many of the other duties of men and women, though, are very similar.

When describing each person's special duties, the Apostle Paul writes: "There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit distributes them. There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord. There are different kinds of working, but in all of them and in everyone it is the same God at work" (1 Cor. 12: 4-6, NIV). Paul also writes about each person's relationship with God by saying: "In Christ there is no Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male or female, for you are all one in Christ" (Gal. 3:28, NIV). **We are all the same in our relationship to God, yet we all have different things to do.** Some of the differences in our callings have to do with whether we have the gift of being a woman or being a man, while many differences have to do with others of our gifts (1 Cor. 12). It is certainly not useful for people to not like what God calls them to do and want to have someone else's gifts instead.

The Scripture does not teach that men do more important or useful work than women. Proverbs 31: 10-31 describes some of the special duties of women. It also describes other jobs of women that are the same as those of some men. For example, both men and women invest in property, make things to sell, sell things to make money, and give to the poor. The ungodly world has often made the mistake of treating women poorly or even abusing them. It can do this both by wrongly limiting the work that women can do, or by expecting them to do things that men should do.

**The duties of women that are described in Proverbs and in other parts of the Bible do not include fighting wars.** Instead, what the Bible says about mighty men means that fighting wars is one of the things that men sometimes need to do to protect families (Deut. 24:5; Joshua 1:14). In saying why they do not believe that women should be sent into combat, the Southern Baptist church leaders emphasize how important the differences are between the duties of men and women. They ". . . warn against and oppose the training and assigning of females to military combat service because: it rejects gender-based distinctions established by God in the order of creation; it undermines male headship in the family by failing to recognize the unique gender-based responsibility of men to protect women and children; . . ." <sup>14</sup> The new U.S. military policies are based on the very different view that *not* putting women into combat wrongly limits the work that women can do. Each group of Bible-believing church

leaders that I am discussing here find Scripture to teach that **putting women at risk of being harmed in war wrongly expects women to do things that men should do.**

Some Christians believe that what the Old and New Testaments say about women does not apply today. Many things certainly have changed since God created people, the Old Testament was written, and Christ lived on earth. The Bible-believing churches believe that the Scriptures are the inspired word of God. This means that the Bible gives us the best way to decide whether or not the things that Christians do fit with the will of God. In this view, what the Bible says about the ways that men and women are the same and the ways that they are different still apply.

**Heroism of women.** The differences between the duties of men and women, including the need for men to protect families, does not mean that men are braver than women. Women also do heroic things that seem so normal that it is easy to not realize how important they are. The most serious of these things is that women face pain and possible death when they give birth to a baby. After the sin of Adam and Eve, the Lord said to the woman, "I will greatly multiply your pain in childbirth, in pain you will bring forth children . . ." (Genesis 3:15).

Women also need to look for and accept the protection of their own children before the children are born even when doing so requires sacrifice. The leaders of the Presbyterian Church in America and the Orthodox Presbyterian Church discuss the special problem that being in combat areas causes for pregnant women. Not only combat, but even some of the difficult training exercises in the military can increase the chance that unborn children can be harmed or killed. Adding to this problem is that women may not know right away when they are pregnant.

The sacrifices that women make during war time are also important. When men are sent to war, women need to take care of their family without them. This is a specific example of the general duties that Scripture especially gives to women (Ps. 138:3; I Tim. 5: 14; Titus 2:4-5; I Pet. 3:1; I Pet. 3:7; Eph. 5:25; 1 Cor. 11:3). Even if women were not now being sent into combat areas, a military commitment raises the question of whether or not a married woman should take any military oath promising to leave her husband and family for many months while leaving other people to take care of her family. The Bible says that it is sometimes the husband's duty to make the sacrifice of leaving to fight (Neh. 4:14) and the wife's duty to make the sacrifice of staying and doing her best for the family without him (Prov. 31: 10-31). Both duties are very hard to do.

Many societies have lost respect for what women do to have children and take care of them. When a society starts to think that way, women can be treated as being cowardly unless they act just like men. Christian women today need special support from other women and from men to deal with this kind of challenge to their faith.

War is sometimes necessary. It is one of the most extreme ways of dealing with evil that men and women face. The way men and women face evil today has its roots in the way God prepared the first man and woman to face evil together (Genesis 1-3). From the beginning, men and women have had different duties. The Scripture is clear that one difference in their duties has to do with protection and fighting war.

## ***Practical matters***

The summary of Biblical Christian beliefs about men, women and combat is based on what leaders of the Bible-believing church groups that I mention find that the Scripture teaches. The duty of men to protect women and children when called on to fight just wars is part of what the Lord intends for men in a sinful world. Women are to accept protection, not to be protectors except as a last resort. No new technologies, no changes in our society's values, and no changes in ways of going to war affect these basic Biblical beliefs. This next section is about some of the practical problems that my military and chaplain advisors tell me that the women who they counsel are now facing in the military.<sup>15</sup> Unlike the Biblical beliefs, these practical problems are discussed among non-Christians and change all the time. The Biblical studies by church leaders that I have mentioned do not talk about many of these problems.

**Easy problems.** Some problems that women face have been easy for the military to handle. For example, one problem was that military women often got sick because they did not drink enough water before training exercises and other difficult activities. Part of the reason that they did not drink enough was that they did not want to need a toilet where there were no facilities for women. This problem has been reduced by issuing devices called FUDDs (*female urinary diversion devices*) to all women in the military. These devices make it possible for women to stand and urinate like men. Other practical problems have been harder to handle.

**Sexual assault and rape.** One problem that women in the military face is sexual assault and rape. Sexual assault and rape are common and even happen in parts of the military where women are not in combat areas. The Department of Defense estimates that almost 5% of the women in the military are sexually assaulted every year, usually by men in the military.<sup>16</sup> About half of those women are raped. Based on these statistics, the chance of sexual assault for a woman joining the military for her first four-year duty is between about 15% and 20%. Her chance of being raped is between about 7% and 10%. The military is trying to change the values of men in the military so that they will not hurt women and to punish men in the military who harm women. Even though the military has tried to reduce these problems, Defense Department statistics show that they are having only limited success. When the military does all it can to provide privacy and protection from abuse for women, it can only do so much. Especially in combat, defeating the enemy is more important than privacy and protection for women fighters. A military slogan that applies especially to combat says "it's not about you."

The Orthodox Presbyterian Church leaders write about rape when women are sent into combat and captured by the enemy, but no church group talks about sexual abuse by other people in the military.

**Sexual relationships.** Sexual assault is an extreme example of problems of sexual temptation in the military (Gen. 2: 24; Mt. 19: 4-6; Ex. 20: 14) that some groups of church leaders did discuss. People in combat situations now need to deal with intimate emotional relationships between men and women that had rarely been part of combat in the past. Emotional relationships among people in combat units have become even more complex because of changes in policies to increase the number of gays and lesbians in the military.

Military policies now support increasing the number of transsexuals – men who want to be treated like women and who dress and sometimes receive surgery to look like women, and women who want to be like men. These policies mean that a Christian woman will usually share a room, toilet, or

shower with other women rather than with men, but she will have no choice about the sexual preferences of these women.

**Abortion.** Another problem that the church group leaders do not discuss is abortion. It would be very difficult for combat units to take care of the special needs that many women face when they become pregnant or to protect children in combat situations. Women who become pregnant now need to leave any combat role, including roles on ships and air craft (see Note 7). Women in the military who want to have children often try to become pregnant and have their children in the United States between the times when they expect to be sent into combat areas. Their ability to control when they will become pregnant and when the military will need to send them into combat areas, though, is limited.

The policy of not allowing pregnant women to stay in combat roles makes two things possible that are not possible for men. One is that a woman can try to become pregnant if she does not want to go into combat, at least until after her child is born. Another is that a woman who wants to remain in a combat role can arrange to have an abortion. For a military woman to make the choice about abortion can be especially difficult. It can be very hard to replace a woman who has a special combat skill or who has worked for a long time with her combat group. A pregnant woman may feel that she must have an abortion unless she is willing to let down or even betray the trust of her friends.

**Social pressures.** Once women join the military, they are strongly influenced not just by military policies and leaders, but also by their military friends, their *battle buddies*. They become part of a group of military people who strongly influence one another, a group that is different from the ones that most civilians join. One difference is that personal life and military duties are so closely tied that military people *must* have close personal relationships with their military groups. In civilian life, we can decide to be close friends with people whose values are different from ours, but we do not need to be close if a relationship requires us to do things against our values. Having strong groups of people who help one another is very important for the military to be successful. Sadly, the government has been working hard to change the military so that everyone in it will pressure one another to reject the Biblical beliefs about women.

These social pressures do not only affect women in the military, but also young women who join military programs at younger ages. The rewards and peer pressures for trying to interest girls in joining the military and influencing their values apply to the military leaders who do programs for young women and children. When a young woman first shows an interest in the military, it is time to discuss with her parents and pastor how to look to Scripture to know whether or not this interest might fit with God's calling for her as a woman. Once a young woman has started in a military program, some of her military friends are likely to suggest that she not pay attention to anyone including a parent who believes that military policies about women and combat are against Scripture. This influence means that Christian young people and their parents should think about military policies while they are with their family and church advisors before getting into military programs.

### **Conclusion<sup>17</sup>**

It can be hard for a Christian woman to decide whether or not to join the military, since joining now includes agreeing to learn to kill, go into combat areas, and fight wars. Before attending any military program, a young woman, her parents, pastor and advisors need to prayerfully consider what the Scripture teaches. They need to work together to find out what being part of the military really

means, and to be cautious about believing what the military and the non-Christian world tells them. Studies of Scripture by Bible-believing church leaders that I have described here and the comments of my chaplain advisors suggest that today's U.S. military policies raise serious just war questions about *how* the U.S. now goes to war. A woman needs to be especially concerned whether or not she is agreeing to work with other people who are actively working against the Lord by preparing and taking women into war (Psalms 1:1, 28:3; Prov. 24: 1, 25:26; I Cor. 5:11). Christians are to be the Lord's coworkers (2 Cor. 6:1) and not to become firmly bound to unbelievers by joining with them when they are working against the Lord (2 Cor. 6:14).

**Parents and children: Who decides?** The decisions that young women and their parents make together is affected by the changes in the relationship between parents and children as children grow up. The responsibilities of parents in the decision for a 10-year old girl to participate in a military program, a 14-year girl to join JROTC, an 18-year old young woman to join ROTC, and a young woman after high school or college to join the military differ. I have sometimes heard people who want a young woman to join the military use the slogan "Only you can decide" to suggest that she should join the military even when her parents tell her not to. I have also heard such people remind children that they are legally adults in the United States at age 18 and can then disregard what their parents say. Comments like these are unlikely to come from church leaders or other responsible adults and should raise a warning flag.

Even when we all become legally adults, the Scripture talks about responsibilities between parents and children. Ephesians 6: 1-4 talks about the relationship between children and parents throughout life. First, it tells children to obey their parents. The Greek word used for children here does not mean just young children. It is not the word that Jesus used sometimes for little children, or that I Cor. 13 uses about for putting away childish things. The language of Ephesians also does not apply only to children under age 18. Instead, it means offspring of any age (as in Romans 9). This passage explains that the Old Testament commandment to "honor" parents during the parents' entire lives (Matt. 7:10-13) includes obeying them. Teenage children and sometimes parents can mistakenly believe that to "respect" parents does not include obedience.

These verses also explain that fathers are not to anger their children by ordering them to do things that do not fit with Scripture. Instead, fathers are to instruct, advise and sometimes even tell their children to do what is consistent with "the discipline and instruction of the Lord." This does not include telling children to do just anything that a parent wants. Parents need to take special care to not go beyond Scripture when guiding their adult children about big life choices. For example, the Scripture is clear that a believing women needs to marry a believing man (e.g., 2 Cor. 6:14). No parent has the authority to give their daughter permission to oppose Scripture on this point. For many other important choices about who to marry, where to live, or what kind of work to do, parents need to continue to instruct their children throughout life in what it means to have and show their faith. If parents believe from Scripture that joining the military would require their child to behave in an ungodly way, then saying "no" may be part of their duty. If parents simply believe that joining the military might not be the best thing for their child, but that joining is not against what Scripture says, then their duty may end with giving their child that advice. Parents may also need to advise a son to seriously consider joining the military if their government is using the military as it should.

I often hear Christian parents talk about whether or not they *support* what their child prefers to do. This word *support* can be confusing. It makes it unclear whether the parent is offering advice, giving permission, or expressing love (e.g., "I'll always support you no matter what you do). Sadly, unless

military policies change to allow women to be protected in support roles away from combat areas as they once were, the Biblical views that I have described suggest that it will be difficult for parents to offer only advice to a daughter who wants to join the military. They may need to clearly say “no.”<sup>18</sup>

The military situation for women and the Scripture studies that I have described are not well known by parents, pastors and advisors. A woman seeking the Lord’s guidance about the military may need to take the lead to provide information to her parents or even her pastor to help you. Even when parents cannot legally force a child to obey their decision after age 18, a godly daughter can keep her parents’ “no” in her heart. She then can use it if she wishes to respond to friends or military recruiters who want her to take an oath saying that she is willing to be trained to use military weapons, be sent to combat areas, and be sent into combat. Lacking that *gift of no* from parents makes it even harder for her to resist what many of my chaplain advisors suggest is a temptation to participate in and promote the sin in current U.S. military policies about women. A Christian woman who joins the military today subjects herself to policies that careful studies by the church group leaders discussed here have concluded from Scripture to be sinful.

My own sense is that Christian fathers often do not do their duty to protect their wives and daughters from combat by faithfully studying and informing their families about military policies and related Scriptures. Sometimes, a father’s problem is fear that women will use silence, criticism, and other hostility to punish them. Because of changes in U.S. culture, it is risky for men to say that there are any differences at all between the duties of men and women. Women church leaders have an important job to do to encourage fathers to help protect their daughters who are targets of other military and government women who have openly rejected Biblical Christianity.<sup>19</sup> This job of women church leaders is something like Deborah responsibility when speaking the word of the Lord in a motherly way to advise Barak to take Israel’s soldiers into battle to protect their families.

**Changing commitments beyond polices and orders.** Apart from just military policies and orders, what happens to a woman after making a firm commitment to the military is likely to be outside a young woman’s experience. I sometimes write scholarly articles and work with the military on research about commitment. *Commitment* means being willing to work hard with a group of people to get something done that you really care about. Getting people to be committed to the military, their own military group, and their military duties is very important for the military’s success. Part of getting someone to be committed is to make them feel like they have made a *choice*. To do this, young women are shown and told things about the military that they will like such as uniforms, close friendships, and rewards. They are supposed to know without being told, however, about the more difficult things that come along with the choice. As young women become involved in military programs or in the military, they are asked to make many small decisions to slowly accept more and more military values. Some parts of this gradual change can be useful for young men who know that they are preparing for combat, but may not be right for young women.

Something else that military people sometimes do to get a young woman committed to the military is to manage her friendships. Doing this means increasing the number and strength of her friendships with people who support current military policies about women. It also means ending or reducing the strength of her relationship with people who disagree with these policies. This includes introducing the young woman to military people in military programs who keep in contact with her through the internet and social media. It also includes weakening relationships with parents, pastors and advisors who agree with Biblical views. Once this process begins, it is difficult for a young woman and even more difficult for her parents, pastors and advisors to end it. Once a young woman is 18, she may

be told, she can join the military, and parents and other people who really love her will accept her choice. Like the Lord, parents often will show the grace to always love us, but that is not a reason to reject what Scripture teaches (Rom. 6:1).

**Staying in military support roles outside combat.** Many friends in local churches have suggested to me that women can join the military and still remain faithful to Scripture by staying out of combat areas. When women join, they tell me, women can sign a contract with the military that says what kind of duties they are willing to do, and that they can refuse orders to go into combat areas. When I told one of the senior chaplains about this idea, he responded that my friends simply have not been around the military enough to know what they are saying.

Certainly, anyone who joins the military can say that they prefer one kind of role or another. Some parts of the military, especially elite combat units, do require people who are already in the military to volunteer. Today, however, even people who usually do desk roles are often assigned to combat areas, stand guard with a rifle, and sometimes accompany combat units. Military training is also designed to slowly increase a woman's willingness to go into combat if she was not very willing when she joined.

Some of a woman's military friends may well support her preference to stay in a support role as much as possible rather than to request duties in combat areas. Many other military friends, however, will pressure women to ask for combat duties because they think it will help women's military careers or because the military needs more women in combat areas. A woman who has worked with a group that is assigned to a combat area will certainly find it very difficult to tell her superiors and friends that accepting the assignment is against her religious beliefs. The influence of such pressures are very difficult for women to truly feel and understand before they join the military. A woman in the military who tries to stay in a support role and tries to refuse assignments to combat areas is likely to be thought of as a coward by many of her male and female military friends. The opinions of these people will come to be very important to a woman in the military; they will be among the closest relationships she will ever have.

Some people I have spoken with also believe that by joining the Air Force, Navy or, especially, the Coast Guard instead of the Army or the Marines, women can stay out of combat and combat areas. This is partly true. Women were being assigned to combat ships in the Navy and Coast Guard and to combat planes in the Air Force before they began to be assigned to land combat with the Army or the Marines. This is because combat in the Army and Marines was considered more dangerous. For the same reason, leaders of the Army and the Marines also both asked the U.S. Defense department to keep some very difficult combat duties for men. Their requests were not accepted.<sup>20</sup> Direct combat does not only happen in the Army and the Marines, though. In recent months, aircraft have been shot down and U.S. Navy ships have fallen into the hands of countries in the Middle East. The guns mounted on Coast Guard ships really are used for combat in coastal areas around the world.<sup>21</sup> All military branches have weapons and use them. In recent wars, people in the military reserves also often have been sent into combat areas along with people in the regular military.

Women can do the same things that men can do to stay in support roles and reduce the chance that they will be sent into combat areas, but nothing more. The military oath that a woman takes means that she accepts that she will have no choice about whether or not to go into combat areas or into direct combat. She is also agreeing to learn to kill, and to get used to the idea of killing. Military programs of all kinds are designed to slowly and gradually harden people so that they get used to killing. Learning to kill

has always been a necessary part of the training and values that men learn in the military. Unlike the situation 20 years ago when women could be in protected support roles, women now are accepting to go through this kind of personal change when they join the military.

**Alternatives to the military.** Daniel 1: 3-16 describes a time when a foreign king tells Daniel, a believer in God, to eat kinds of food against God's commands. Daniel takes the risk of suggesting an alternative -- that he eat something else. Daniel later faces happy and unhappy times, including facing death, but finally influences the kingdom in good ways. In a similar way, one alternative for a Christian woman who wants to help the U.S. military is to work for the military as a civilian. Another is to work for an embassy or a part of the government's foreign service that supports the military. Some people can train to be scholars in military policy and help train officers, as I sometimes do. These alternatives still mean that Christians need to think about whether their country is going to war for the right reasons and in the right ways, but working for the military as a civilian avoids many of the issues for women that the Bible raises about current military policy.

Another alternative for Christians is to accept the sacrifices of working for Christian missions. The most important wars that Christians fight are not the kind that are fought by the military, but are spiritual (Ephesians 6: 10-13). To die at the hands of an enemy is horrible, but the spiritual death of being separated from the Lord is worse. Many, many people who are not committed to Christ will look to the rewards that the government offers for joining the military. Only committed Christians, both men and women, are able to put on the armor of God to fight against the evil that is even present during peacetime both close to one's home and abroad (Ephesians 6: 10-18).

**What Christian men are facing in the military.** The problems with using women for combat mean that Christian men in the military also face some difficult issues. The Scripture teaches men to protect women, but military men need to obey orders to prepare women for combat and send women into combat. This is hard if the women are not believers, but harder if they are believers and knowingly doing something that does not fit with Scripture. Not only do men need to obey orders to do as they are told, but military policies now say that they must fully support sending women into combat. These policies are putting Christian men who are already in the military in a difficult situation.

The issues of dealing with sexual relationships in combat areas are also faced by men. Chaplains tell me that dealing with emotional relationships with women in combat situations often poses a challenge to a young man's commitment to complete a combat mission. Dealing with the felt need to protect women soldiers also challenges a man's mission commitment. For men to live in intimate combat conditions with other men who have differing sexual orientations from their own is also challenging.

**Other implications of military policy changes.** I have written here about what military policy changes mean for the choice of Christian women to join the military, since the purpose here is not to suggest military policy changes. Military policy changes also have other effects, though. For example, only young men now need to register for the draft, but the change in policies about women means that young women are soon likely to need to register. The idea that men should not hit women becomes more difficult to support if Bible-believing Christian men are ordering Bible-believing women into areas where they will not just be hit, but may be killed. Women are now coming home from war who have been wounded both in body and mind. The effects on their families will become known in future years. A few Christian leaders are working on a special kind of conscientious objector law to help women in churches that agree with their view that women should not be sent into combat or be drafted. The



problems that Christian women and men are now facing in the military who joined *before* the new policies were put in place is even more difficult than for young people who are now thinking about joining now that they *know* the new policies.

**What to do.** Christians in high school and college as well as their pastors and parents, should consider whether the reasons for joining the military are really as important as they seem. How much is a Christian woman really following God's calling, and how much does she just want the training, experiences, and rewards that the military offers? Is it really a good idea at a young age to take an oath that will force her to stay in the military for several years while she is still learning about the Biblical calling of women and her own personal calling, possibly including marriage and starting a family? Has she thought what it would be like for her future physical and mental well-being and for her ability to fulfill her calling to serve her family if she becomes hardened to or mentally harmed by seeing killing, experiences sexual abuse, or is wounded in the military?

In joining the military, is a woman really just accepting the proper payment for doing what the Lord has for her to do? In some situations, seeking military duties is the right thing to do, and soldiers deserve all the rewards that they receive and more. In other situations, the rewards may be for behaving in an ungodly way and doing something that is not right to do. These concerns especially apply to joining the military, but also to joining military programs for children, and to JROTC, Academy, and ROTC programs in hopes of getting a high quality free education.

I expect that most people who have read this far are deeply concerned to seek the will of God for an important life choice. The practical problems that are also discussed by non-Christians might seem like the big reasons for being concerned about women going into combat, but they are not. The real problems have to do with following or rejecting the guidance the Lord provides in Scripture. For a young woman to seek the Lord's guidance about joining the military is not just a matter of finding enough uninformed Christians to justify her original preference about what to do. It means prayerfully seeking advisors whose views are based on the best information about the situation in the military and what the Scripture teaches. As in all areas of life, I hope that Christians who are thinking about being involved in any way with the military will sincerely consider the Scriptures, and that the efforts of the military chaplains and other leaders of the Bible-believing churches that I mention here will help them find and follow the Lord's guidance.

## Footnotes

- <sup>1</sup> Presbyterian and Reformed Commission on Chaplains and Military Personnel (PRCC). <http://pcamna.org/chaplain-ministries/>  
Chaplain's Manual, PRCC, pp. 23-26. <http://pcamna.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/PRCCMP-Chaplains-Manual-Feb.-2015.pdf>  
North America Missions Board of the Southern Baptist Convention. <http://www.namb.net/military-ministry/>
- <sup>2</sup> Presbyterian Church in America (1986). Christian Responsibility in the Nuclear Age  
Position paper from the 15th General Assembly, 1987, p. 517, Appendix U, pp. 439-454.  
(<http://www.pcahistory.org/pca/1-439.pdf>)
- <sup>3</sup> Metaxas, Eric. (2010). *Bonhoeffer: Pastor, martyr, prophet, spy*. Nashville: Thomas Nelson.
- <sup>4</sup> National Women's Law Center (2015). Restrictions on assignments of military women: A brief history.  
Washington, D.C. [http://nwlc.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/08/women\\_in\\_military\\_assignments\\_a\\_brief\\_history\\_revised\\_june\\_20152.pdf](http://nwlc.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/08/women_in_military_assignments_a_brief_history_revised_june_20152.pdf)
- <sup>5</sup> <http://www.foxnews.com/us/2013/05/27/america-female-soldiers-bravely-serving-and-dying-in-line-duty.html>
- <sup>6</sup> Military Leadership Diversity Commission. March 15, 2011. Executive Summary, From Representation to Inclusion: Diversity leadership for the 21<sup>st</sup> century military.  
[https://timeopinions.files.wordpress.com/2011/12/mldc\\_executive\\_summary.pdf](https://timeopinions.files.wordpress.com/2011/12/mldc_executive_summary.pdf)
- <sup>7</sup> At the time of writing, each branch of the U.S. military has similar regulations regarding pregnancy. The policy for the Marine Corps is an example: Marine Corps Maternity and Convalescent Leave Policy Update, 2/25/2016,  
<https://phc.amedd.army.mil/topics/healthyliving/wh/Pages/Women'sHealthPortal.aspx>
- <sup>8</sup> One example is the set of children's programs associated with the National Historic Site associated with the aircraft carrier Intrepid -- <http://www.intrepidmuseum.org/Education>.
- <sup>9</sup> Reformed Presbyterian Church 2004 General Assembly, Resolution on Women in the Military.  
<http://www.rpcga.us/SiteContent/65/documents/Resolution%20on%20Women%20in%20the%20Military.pdf>
- <sup>10</sup> U.S. Code Title 10. Subtitle A, Part II, Chap. 31, Paragraph 502.
- <sup>11</sup> Orthodox Presbyterian Church, Minutes of the Sixty-eighth General Assembly (2001), pp. 258-282.  
Report of the Committee on Women in the Military and in Combat  
<http://www.opc.org/GA/WomenInMilitary.html>
- <sup>12</sup> PCA final position in 30th General Assembly in 2002 (<http://www.pcahistory.org/pca/aiscwim.html#3>)  
is based on a document *Man's Duty to Protect Women* whose arguments were accepted by the presenting committee. The reference for this document:

General Assembly Actions and Position Papers of the Presbyterian Church in America: Ad Interim Study Committee on Women in the Military. *Man's Duty to Protect Women*. 2001. PCA Historical Center Archives and Manuscript Repository for the Continuing Presbyterian Church.  
<http://www.pcahistory.org/pca/01-278.html>

<sup>13</sup> Reformed Church of the United States, 1996. *Statement on Women in Combat*.  
<http://www.rcus.org/index.php/doctrine/position-papers/232-women-military-1996>

<sup>14</sup> Southern Baptist Convention, June 1998. *Resolution on Women in Combat*.  
<http://www.sbc.net/resolutions/amResolution.asp?ID=1089>

<sup>15</sup> I base most of the information in this section on what at least two of my chaplain advisors have told me or that I can check from published information. I have made revisions if any of the several dozen others who have had an opportunity to review this material have raised questions about any point.

<sup>16</sup> Kime, Patricia. Incidents of rape in military much higher than previously reported. *Military Times*, December 5, 2014.  
<http://www.militarytimes.com/story/military/pentagon/2014/12/04/pentagon-rand-sexual-assault-reports/19883155/>

Department of Defense, 2014. *Department of Defense Annual Report on Sexual Assault in the Military: Fiscal Year 2014*.  
[http://sapr.mil/public/docs/reports/FY14\\_Annual/FY14\\_DoD\\_SAPRO\\_Annual\\_Report\\_on\\_Sexual\\_Assault.pdf](http://sapr.mil/public/docs/reports/FY14_Annual/FY14_DoD_SAPRO_Annual_Report_on_Sexual_Assault.pdf)

<sup>17</sup> More than in the other sections of this booklet, the discussion in this “Conclusion” section is based on conversations with chaplains and military people and on my own experiences and reflections. Revisions have been made based on detailed comments by several of my chaplain and military advisors. Nevertheless, this section should be read as harder to document than is the section covering “Government Policies on Women in the Military,” and as much less carefully reviewed by any church leaders than is the section covering “Biblical Christian Beliefs about Women in the Military.”

<sup>18</sup> The discussion here about parent-child relationships gives a simplistic summary of possibilities to consider when a parent and a late adolescent or young adult child strongly differ from one another about the implications of Scripture for any basic life choice. Such extremely sensitive situations need to be worked through much more thoroughly by those who are actually dealing with them than can be considered here. They are best discussed with a pastor who will have encountered more such situations than will most parents, and who will have training and resources available to help both parent and child work them through. A book dealing with related issues from a Reformed Biblical perspective is: Tripp, P.D. (2001). *Age of Opportunity: A Biblical Guide to Parenting Teens*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Phillipsburg, N.J.: P&R Publishing.

<sup>19</sup> For example, the current chair of the West Point Academy Board of Visitors is Brenda S. Fulton. She was the first woman graduate of West Point to be legally married to another woman in a ceremony at the Academy's chapel. <http://www.glaad.org/blog/brenda-sue-fulton-selected-us-military-academy-board-visitors-chairwoman>

<sup>20</sup> Dec 04, 2015 | by Hope Hodge Seck Commandant to Marines: 'It's Time to Move Out' on Women in Combat, Military.com. <http://www.military.com/daily-news/2015/12/04/commandant-to-marines-its-time-to-move-out-on-women-in-combat.html>

<sup>21</sup> See the Coast Guard website about its combat missions at -- [uscg.mil](http://uscg.mil).