

Warhorn interview: Male responsibility and female agency.

Posted on [February 8, 2019](#) by [Dalrock](#)

For context see [this post](#). You can also see the [whole series](#).

This is I believe our longest exchange, and I'll apologize in advance for any difficulty my readers have keeping track of who wrote what. However, I think at the end we got to the meat of the issue. I've separated our emails by marking the boundaries between them. Nathan's comments are in blockquotes. My responses are in normal typeface with quotes that I use to bolster my argument in blockquotes. Where I'm re-quoting Nathan in my response or he is re-quoting me in his response I precede the quote with "@Nathan" and "@Dalrock".

Unlike the rest of the series, this discussion wasn't a response to a specific question Nathan asked. Instead it is in response to a comment he made when proposing the interview. I chose to add it to the exchange because it captures what I think is core to our disagreement:

[-----**Begin my email to Nathan**-----]

@Nathan

If I'm not mistaken, you see the work of my pastor and others like him as somehow undercutting the concept of female moral agency. I see your work as needlessly undercutting male responsibility in the name of establishing female moral agency.

The problem is that the most ridiculous things are being claimed as male responsibility in order to deny reality and therefore *shirk* responsibility. Feminists openly and methodically marched through all of our institutions for decades. Conservative Christians responded to this by simply denying that it was happening. Changing the subject to men, no matter how ridiculous, is the go-to coping mechanism here. This is why we have Pastor Doug Wilson teaching that a Christian husband is responsible for

making his wife more physically attractive. Wilson starts by parroting the very feminists he fears confronting:

A common assumption in the world is that women must “keep themselves up” in order to keep a man. In the world of attracting and being attracted, women are taught to view themselves as being primarily responsible for their own attractiveness or loveliness. This viewpoint is inculcated early. Once young girls used to play with baby dolls, seeing themselves in the role of the nurturing mother; now they can be seen playing with Barbie dolls, seeing themselves in the place of the doll. And of course, the doll is both pretty and stacked. The pressure is on and stays on.

But Wilson has a solution to the feminist condemnation of the evil patriarchy. Christian men are shirking their God given responsibility!

The Bible teaches that a Christian husband is responsible for the loveliness of his wife.

I'll note that this isn't a dumb comment Wilson made off the cuff. This particular dumb comment is from his book *Reforming Marriage**. I'll also note that Wilson clarifies that he doesn't mean this metaphorically:

When husbands undertake the assigned responsibility of loving their wives in such a way that they grow in loveliness, they need to understand that the results will be visible.

It isn't just Wilson who makes up this kind of zany stuff to avoid confronting feminism. Feminists, like gays, have been pushing for decades to fully integrate the armed forces, including front line combat and submarines. If conservative Christians were ever going to find the courage to confront the feminists, it would be on this topic. This is at most a secondary issue for the average conservative Christian woman. Very few conservative Christian women want to don combat boots and go to war. Moreover, what these

women are doing is the Old Testament definition of [cross dressing](#). But still, even *here* the thought of confronting the rebellion of a handful of butch feminists in the pews was simply too much. So conservative Christians invented a fiction that women weren't coveting men's roles, and instead men were forcing women to push their way into combat by shirking their responsibility. Can you imagine historians a few decades from now coming across resolutions like [this](#), or the statements I quote [here](#), [here](#), and [here](#)? No one outside the rarefied world of conservative Christians believes this is what is happening. Try telling this to someone on the street; they will laugh at you, and rightly so!

Examples of this are everywhere. One common claim is that feminism is the logical reaction to Christian men shirking their responsibilities. In one sense they are acknowledging feminism, but at the same time they deny what is really happening. The CBMW [asked Mary Kassian](#):

In practical ways in your marriage relationship, how do you balance gender equality with male headship?

If you aren't familiar with her Kassian is a Woman's Studies professor at Southern Baptist Seminary, and was with the CBMW founders when they created the name [complementarian](#). Kassian replies explaining that because her husband fulfills his responsibility she doesn't feel the temptation of feminist rebellion (emphasis mine):

...the question of male-female equality has not been an issue in my mind. I am secure and confident in who God has made me as a woman. Brent upholds and guards my "equality" so I do not feel the need to do so.

Pastor Matt Chandler makes the same argument in his sermon [Women's Hurdles](#) ([transcript](#)). Chandler explains that if a Christian husband fulfills his responsibility to love his wife, she *can't* be tempted into feminist rebellion:

Really, men, here is a great way to gauge how you're serving, loving, and practicing your headship. If the most secularized feminist in the world showed up in your home and began to kind of coach your wife toward freedom and liberation from your tyranny, our wives should be so well cared for, so nourished, so sowed into and loved, they would say, "What you're describing is actually tyranny. I love where I am. I am honored. I am encouraged. My man sacrifices so that I might grow in my gifts. He will oftentimes lay down his own desires in order to serve me more. My husband goes to bed tired at night. He pours into our children. He encourages me. All that comes out of his mouth, sans a couple of little times here and there, is him building me up in love."

...

Men, here is a good opportunity. If you're like, "Well, gosh, I don't think she would say that at all," then, men, I think on the way home, you should probably repent and confess before the Lord to your wife.

This stuff is flat out nuts, but no one notices within conservative Christianity because it is so common and it has been going on for so long. I could offer more examples, but instead I'll pose some questions to you. Do you believe any of the following:

1. The Bible teaches that a Christian husband is responsible for the loveliness of his wife.
2. The reason feminists are pushing to open combat for women is because men are refusing to fight.
3. Women can't be tempted into feminist rebellion if their husbands love them sufficiently.

The irony of all of this is men really *are* abdicating their responsibility. These absurd lies are used by cowardly men to avoid manning up and challenging the feminist rebellion. In this sense I hope we are aligned. *You* want men to man up. *I* want men to man up. But manning up doesn't mean cowering in fear while striking a heroic pose. Manning up means doing what is difficult. We are failing Christian women, and women in general. But we aren't failing them by not making them pretty, or forcing them to

insist on taking on the roles of men, or making it possible for them to feel the temptation to sin.

Again I'll stop here to let you get a word in edgewise.

*For more context of the quotes, see [this post](#).

[-----**Nathan Replied**-----]

To answer your questions:

@Dalrock

- 1. The Bible teaches that a Christian husband is responsible for the loveliness of his wife.*

In one sense, a Christian husband is responsible for everything about his wife. He is her head. This is not mutually exclusive with her being a moral agent fully capable of making her own choices, and responsible for the ramifications of said choices. Do I think that a husband can magically make his wife more physically attractive by caring for her? No. Do I understand, in a general sort of way, what people who make those claims are getting at—that a loved woman is a lovely woman? Yes. Do I think the rhetoric on that point can be overwrought, even misleading, especially among pansy complementariness like Chandler? 100% yes.

[@Dalrock](#)

- 2. The reason feminists are pushing to open combat for women is because men are refusing to fight.*

Again it seems fairly obvious that both things are true. Women are moral agents who are tempted to rebel. And men are moral agents who

are tempted to abdicate. Adam abdicates in Genesis 3, and Eve is straight up told by God she will rebel. We can parse the rhetoric or this or that public figure, but any doctrine that denies men's temptation to abdicate, or women's temptation to rebel is wrong.

[@Dalrock](#)

3. Women can't be tempted into feminist rebellion if their husbands love them sufficiently.

No. Their husbands must also rule over them and discipline them. And even then, women are moral agents. Some of them will harden their hearts against God. Some of them will fall away from the faith. Some of them will remain submissive and pure-hearted and feminine even if their husbands are jerks who don't love them at all. There are a lot of women in this world that will do a lot of different things.

But very generally, if a husband loves his wife and rules over her well, she will be less likely to be tempted to rebel, just the same as if a king loves his subjects and rules over them well, they will be less tempted to rebel. That's just common sense. We can't throw that out just because many people use that kind of language to deny female moral agency.

[-----My reply to Nathan-----]

@Nathan

[@Dalrock](#)

2. The reason feminists are pushing to open combat for women is because men are refusing to fight.

Again it seems fairly obvious that both things are true. Women are moral agents who are tempted to rebel. And men are moral agents who are tempted to abdicate. Adam abdicates in Genesis 3, and Eve is

straight up told by God she will rebel. We can parse the rhetoric or this or that public figure, but any doctrine that denies men's temptation to abdicate, or women's temptation to rebel is wrong.

I'll circle back on the other two**, but for now want to probe you on this. I don't think you understood what I'm saying. Conservative Christians are saying the reason women are pushing to integrate all parts of the armed forces is because men are unwilling to fight. Do you really believe that is what is going on, even though feminists tell us they are doing it to advance feminism? If so, do you feel the same way about gays pushing into the military? Are they doing so because straight men are refusing to fight, regardless of what gay activists tell us? Likewise, are cis men refusing to fight, which led to transgendereds insisting on being admitted into the military? The other day I heard (second hand) about a man making the same excuse for women pushing to be ordained as pastors; a Christian man said they had to, because men were refusing to become pastors.

[**Given the length of the thread I ended up not circling back on those two topics in this part of the discussion.]

[-----**Nathan Replied**-----]

Of course there are rebellious feminist women out there who are pushing for rebellious feminist agendas. When feminists tell me that's what they're doing, I believe them. They are culpable, they are wicked, they should be called to repent.

To use the military example, if every lazy man in America repented and said he was willing to work hard in defense of this country, we would still have to contend with rebellious feminist women who want to usurp their bounds.

That said, it seems obvious that these things tend to grow in an environment where men are evading responsibility. To admit that is not to deny the other things.

[-----My reply to Nathan-----]

@Nathan:

*Of course there are rebellious feminist women out there who are pushing for rebellious feminist agendas. When feminists tell me that's what they're doing, I believe them. They are culpable, they are wicked, **they should be called to repent.***

But they haven't been called to repent, and won't be, because complementarians insist on changing the subject to men. This is exactly what has happened and continues to happen on the subject of women pushing into combat. Complementarians form consensus with feminists that men are bad and women should be cherished, and the matter is left there. In theory someone, somewhere will hold women accountable for crossdressing. But never complementarians, and never today. See the PCA resolution on the subject that Pastor Bayly led. Women rebelled by demanding to take on men's roles, so the PCA drafted a resolution condemning men for not fulfilling their roles (a lie), and then stressed the importance of cherishing and protecting women (a non sequitur at best). This is cruel to women and girls. Imagine if we did the same thing to boys. Imagine if we responded to [men] cross dressing by declaring that we are appalled that men feel the need to be feminine because women won't do it, and men deserve more than they currently get from women. This would ironically be more true than the claim for women and the military. But it would still be a lie, and it would be cruel to men and boys who are tempted to sin in the way [crossdressing men] are sinning, because we would be sending the most confusing message imaginable to them in order to avoid offending [crossdressers].

@Nathan:

To use the military example, if every lazy man in America repented and said he was willing to work hard in defense of this country, we would still have to contend with rebellious feminist women who want to usurp their bounds.

This misses the point. You may as well change the statement to:

If every rude man in America covered his mouth when he coughed, we would still have to contend with rebellious feminist women who want to usurp their bounds.

Because one has nothing to do with the other. Even worse, we don't have a problem with men being unwilling to work hard in the defense of the country. This implies that Christian men like myself and Pastor Bayly who have never joined the military sinned by not having done so. It is a lie.

@Nathan

*That said, it seems obvious that these things tend to grow in an environment where men are evading responsibility. **To admit that is not to deny the other things.***

Of course it is to deny the other things. As I pointed out with multiple links, this is what is being done regarding women in the military. I urge you to go check the sources and see what I mean. Bayly's PCA [resolution](#) blamed men for non-existent sins and didn't confront women's real sins. The same is true for the examples I provided by John Piper, Joe Carter, Denny Burk and Owen Strachan [here](#). The same is true for the quotes I provided from Doug Phillips' Vision Forum [here](#). The same is true for the other example I provided by CBMW Executive Director Owen Strachan [here](#). In all of these cases the sin of women demanding to crossdress and usurp the roles of men was not addressed. Making up sins for men *absolutely* is being used to avoid holding women responsible. If I'm wrong, it should be trivially easy for you to prove it to me since the links are all there. I urge you, please show me where any of these examples state that a woman wanting to go into combat is sinning.

[-----**Nathan Replied**-----]

I can see that it will take a lot more discussion and shifting through the sources for us to come to any terms on this point. I wouldn't be surprised

if this ends up being the crux of our discussion, and it may be the crux of our eventual podcast on the subject.

However, it would be helpful to me if we could address the broader spectrum of questions I've sent you. And then we can circle back around and dig down as we need to. That would help give me the context I need. As we have the deeper discussions, I want to make sure I understand fully where you're coming from. Hope that makes sense.

[-----**My reply to Nathan**-----]

I'm fine with that. Hopefully I'll have more for you shortly.

[I then followed up with:]

FYI,

I just went through these myself to make sure I hadn't missed anything the first time around. I count ten separate references nested the links I provided above.

1. Pastor Bayly: [PCA report on women in combat.](#)
2. John Piper: [Co-ed Combat and Cultural Cowardice](#)
3. John Piper: [More on women in combat.](#)
4. Joe Carter: [Women in Combat: A Good Idea?](#)
5. Denny Burk: [Women in Combat and the Undoing of Civilization](#)
6. Owen Strachan: [Women Should Not Be in Combat \(Says a Female Marine Captain\)](#)
7. Owen Strachan: [Women in combat: A complementarian perspective](#)
8. Vision Forum [issues page](#)
9. Vision Forum [Women in Military page](#)
10. Vision Forum [America the Barbarous: New Pentagon Policy Sanctions Women in Combat](#)

I reviewed all of them and they are 10 for 10 in blaming men, and 10 for 10 in avoiding the issue of women's rebellion. As Dr. Jason K. Allen, President of Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary puts it:

Biblical complementarity is not fundamentally about what opportunities women must forgo, but what responsibilities men must take up.

[-----**End of Exchange**-----]

Note: Nathan reiterated at the end of our process that he may be adding further replies in the podcast. Also, in our email exchange I referred to a famous crossdressing man. I've changed those references to generic terms given the WordPress rules on "deadnaming".