

WOMANHOOD: THE FORGOTTEN GLORY **Song of Solomon 6:10**

(NASB) "Who is this that grows like the dawn, as beautiful as the full moon, as pure as the sun, as awesome as an army with banners?"

INTRODUCTION

Christian Headlines.com reported on Wednesday, January 20, that Syrian women have joined together to form the "Female Protection Forces of the Land between the Two Rivers" with the goal of fighting the Islamic State. These women have completed military training at a camp in Al-Qahtaniyeh. Described as wives, mothers, and professionals, their primary focus is to protect Christian areas. One fighter named Babylonia graduated with the first class in December. She told a reporter, "I'm a practicing Christian, and thinking about my children makes me stronger and more determined in my fight against ISIS." Fox News reports the all-women volunteer unit began work this month on the front lines fighting the Islamic State.

These Syrian women are not built like football linebackers; so masculine they are females in name only. The photo posted with this article (<http://www.christianheadlines.com/blog/women-fighters-take-forefront-of-middle-east-conflict.html>) reveals they are ordinary, often quite attractive, women who have been forced by enemy combatants threatening their families with mayhem, enslavement, or death to fight if necessary to protect their homes and loved ones. They embody the Biblical description of the ideal woman; combining beauty, purity, and strength! Such women inspire the best men around them to confront life's worst challenges with strength and bravery or shame the worst men around them for their cowardice and weakness.

Several years before the first Gulf War (a military operation of late-1990-to-early-1991 to expel the occupying Iraqi forces from Kuwait), Barbara Walters did a story on gender roles in Kuwait. She observed women traditionally walked about 10 feet behind their husbands. Years later, Walters returned to Kuwait and discovered men were now walking several yards behind their wives. As a respected investigative reporter, she eagerly approached a woman on the street for an explanation. "This is marvelous," Walters gushed. "What enabled women here to achieve this reversal of roles?" The woman replied, "Land mines!"

Our two Outline point today are The Hollow Calling of a Woman and The Highest Calling of a Woman.

I. THE HOLLOW CALLING OF A WOMAN

Gloria Steinem, now 81, helped launch the Women's Liberation Movement in the 1960s & 70s and co-founded *Ms. Magazine*. She came from a religiously confused home: a Presbyterian mother and a Jewish father. Her dad, never a good provider as a traveling antiques dealer, kept moving his family across OH in a small trailer. These instabilities contributed to her mom's nervous breakdown at age 34. Her dad then left the family and her mentally unstable mom had trouble finding steady work. Gloria somehow translated her own family's struggles into the conviction her mother's woes stemmed from the social and political equality women lacked in this country. She deeply resented that women seemed forced to choose between pursuing a career or pursuing a family. Steinem and others behind the Women's Liberation Movement succeeded in changing our culture. But what they failed to realize was that by allowing men to define "success" for them, American women would lose more than they would gain. It was with a sense of great satisfaction, not great sorrow, that Steinem has gloated, "Some of us are becoming the men we wanted to marry."

The modern woman seems bent upon proving what the Bible has declared all along—that women are equal in worth and ability to men. Women have now succeeded in breaking from the confines of the home. They are contributing in every sector of our workforce in record numbers. Our country has never had as many women lawyers, and doctors, engineers, executives, and military personnel as we do now. And they are doing a fine job. There are two main problems with all of this, though. First, women now allow men to

define "success" for them. Sadly, this holds true all too often even in our Christian families. When was the last time you heard of a young girl having success and fulfillment described to her in terms of enabling a good man, raising the godliest children possible, or devoting herself to Christian missions or reform efforts for the betterment of society, rather than in terms of pursuing the career of her choice!

Secondly, America has paid a terrible price as a result. The modern home is much more like a hotel than anything else. Family members come together long enough to eat and sleep and then rush off in all directions again. Someone has remarked, "Most homes nowadays seem to be on three shifts. Father is on the night shift, mother is on the day shift, and the children shift for themselves." Is it any wonder that record incidents of unwed pregnancy, venereal disease, alcoholism, violence, and child abuse are breaking down American society on every hand? Does it seem startling that as recently as 1960 over 90% of America's teenagers were *not* engaging in premarital sex and 95/100 babies were born into homes with married moms and dads? What is the single greatest factor contributing to this gross decline in the quality of our families and of our society? No one is guarding the *quality* of life in our nation anymore.

Judge Beatrice Mullaney, of Fall River, MA, declared that her many years on the bench convinced her women are principally to blame for lowered moral standards in the United States. She states,

Women are anxious to exercise freedoms and permissiveness promoted by the Women's Movement, and the result is dissolution of marriages, homes and families. In nearly two decades as a judge, I've heard more than 10,000 divorce, separation, and custody cases. And I've seen moral decay, especially in family responsibilities . . . and shirking of duties. I blame women almost entirely for lowering the moral standards of this Country.

Dr. Gerald L. Klerman (1928-92), nationally renowned psychiatrist and expert on depression, served as chief of the Federal mental health agency. In 1986, he observed, "Today's young women are more likely to become depressed than their mothers were and at a younger age. [The] reasons include increased economic pressure to contribute to family income, [their] changing role in society, [their] inability to meet their own expectations, [and] a sense of having lost control" [of who they are]. In other words, girls used to grow up with the clear understanding society expected them to celebrate their uniquely feminine character qualities and to nurture respect for life and moral decency. This has been lost. Phyllis Schlafly is an American constitutional lawyer and author who founded the Eagle Forum to lead the fight against attempts to strip women of traditional legal protections and exemptions. A mother of 6 and grandmother of 14, Schlafly brings the current state of affairs in our nation into crystal clear focus by noting, "No country in history ever sent the mothers of toddlers off to fight enemy soldiers until the United States did this in the Iraq War."

Our society now churns out women who are masculinized in their dress, habits, mannerisms, and goals. Or, they promote sexual gratification almost equally with men, no longer upholding the healthy restraints of marriage that encourage love over lust and commitment over convenience. In the name of equality, women have actually *lowered* themselves to men's standards and have complied with male lust by accepting the notion being a sexual object is normal. The *Arizona Daily Star* featured an article in 1995 in which many Tucsonans in their 20s and early 30s said traditional dating was too much of a commitment to expect from them prior to "hooking up" sexually, or they said dating is simply unnecessary because most of them, male and female, believed it was normal to be sexually involved within hours of meeting each other. Few of them will ever enjoy genuine love in a committed relationship or an enduring marriage.

II. THE HIGHEST CALLING OF A WOMAN

I wish I could tell you "The Perfect Story" was recently found among previously undiscovered writings of Solomon. This is not the case, but you'll enjoy this story. "There was a perfect man who met a perfect woman. After a perfect courtship, they had a perfect wedding. Their life together was, of course, perfect.

One snowy, stormy Christmas Eve, this perfect couple drove along a winding road and noticed someone at the roadside in distress. Being the perfect couple, they stopped to help. There stood Santa Claus with a huge bundle of toys. Not wanting to disappoint any children on the eve of Christmas, the perfect couple loaded Santa and his toys into their vehicle. Soon they were helping Santa deliver the toys. Sadly, driving conditions deteriorated and the perfect couple and Santa Claus had an accident. Only one of them survived the accident. Who was the survivor? The perfect woman. She's the only one that really existed in the first place. Everyone knows there is no Santa Claus and there's certainly no such thing as a perfect man!"

This is just some writer's idea of a nice story. Does the Bible tell us a "perfect woman" truly exists? No. But did you know the most inspirational description of anyone in the Bible other than of our Triune Creator or an angel is not of a man, but of a woman? In **Song of Solomon 6:10**, female companions of the Bride echo the esteem and wonder with which the Bridegroom cherishes his beloved: "'Who is this that grows like the dawn, as beautiful as the full moon, as pure as the sun, as awesome as an army with banners?'" Study of the underlying Hebrew of this verse reveals the Bridegroom declares his Bride is as "lovely" or "fair" as the full moon in all its splendor and so "polished" or "clean of impurity" that she can stand in the clear light of the sun's day without fear of moral impurity being discovered.

The Hebrew word for "banner" is rare. It derives either from a noun for a military "standard," as used to designate the army of each of the 12 tribes of Israel in the days of Moses (**Numbers 1:52**), or from the verb "to look," or "behold." Listen to how the Bridegroom "looks upon" his precious Bride in **Song of Solomon 6:4** (NASB): "'You are as beautiful as Tirzah, my darling, as lovely as Jerusalem, as awesome as an army with banners.'" In Solomon's day, Tirzah held title as the most prominent and beautiful city of northern Israel, as Jerusalem did in the south. Later, in the days of Israel's divided Kingdoms, these cities served as royal residences. In essence, the Bridegroom pays his Bride this ultimate compliment: "You are fit for a king!" When comparing the Bride's appearance to two stunning and well-fortified cities of Israel, "as awesome as an army with banners" seems appropriate. But in **6:10**, where the impact of the Bride's appearance is said to rival the splendor of celestial bodies, the NIV prefers to translate this same Hebrew phrase, "as majestic as the stars in procession." If we combine the descriptions of **6:4** and **6:10**, it's fair to state the Bridegroom praises his godly heart-mate for her feminine beauty, he testifies he is morally inspired by her purity, and he credits her strengths with supporting him as he fulfills God's calling in the world. Thus, he seeks to convey that this special woman possesses such an intimidating combination of physical attributes and character strength that she inspires awe and wonder within him!

Most of us know of Martin Luther. In the early 1500's, he spearheaded the reform movement known today as the Protestant Reformation. He helped to restore the true meaning of Biblical "salvation by faith in Christ alone" after centuries of corrupt church teachings and traditions nearly obliterated it. Luther's achievements are truly remarkable, but it took the wise activities of his wife, Katherine, to give stability to his efforts. When he often suffered from acute depression, she lifted his spirits. When he proved to have little sense about money, she assumed responsibility for their finances. She turned their home into a self-sustaining household, hostel, and hospital. She oversaw the planting and harvesting of crops, and the tending of animals, on farmland she had the business sense to acquire. Martin Luther said, "God divided the hand into fingers so that money could slip through" more easily, and was always giving away food and money to others. But without Katherine, there would have been nothing to give, and they and their six children would have gone without. Martin Luther could preach, and counsel, and crusade as he did, shaking the whole Western world in the process, because such an efficient, godly, and caring wife stood at his side, sustaining his efforts. He lived as close to God as does any man, yet his regard for his wife is shown by his words, "In domestic affairs I am led by Katie. Otherwise, I am led by the Holy Spirit."

Katherine Luther underscores a woman's highest calling: not to *compete* with a man but to *complete* a man! A woman may be as successful as a man in the business world. The Bible never says God gave

women less ability than men. But God designed the *focus* of their ability differently than a man's. **Genesis 2:18** describes why God created a woman: "Then the LORD God said, 'It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper as his complement.'" "Complement" ("one perfectly matched") best translates the Hebrew word defining the "helper" God designed expressly to "aid, relieve, and assist" the man God created. **I Corinthians 11:7-9** makes more explicit the distinctive roles God designed for men and women: "A man, in fact, . . . is God's image and glory, but woman is man's glory. ⁸For man did not come from woman, but woman came from man. ⁹And man was not created for woman, but woman for man."

Life tends to run in either one of two directions—in the direction of quantity or quality. It is given to men generally to take care of the *quantity* of life; to build and to achieve. It is given to women to watch over the *quality* of life; to ensure what is built is built for the right reasons, and the life that results is worth living. History records women have been behind most major reform movements. Women brought dignity and humanity to our prisons, to the care of the sick in our hospitals, and to the care of the wounded in our battlefields. Who founded the American Red Cross in 1881, a man or a woman? A woman, Clara Barton, who was inspired by the heroic English wartime nurse, Florence Nightingale (1820-1910).

A woman may have a remarkable career. The godly Christian, Marie Curie (1867-1934), assisted her husband, Pierre, in the discovery of Radium, for which they were both awarded a Nobel Prize in physics in 1903. After Pierre's death, she continued her research and won a second Nobel Prize in 1911 in chemistry. But Marie's career never became an end in itself. It served nurturing goals by assisting her husband, providing for her family, and improving the quality of life. She rejected the temptation to degrade the highest calling of a woman for a hollow calling. Marie Curie may even have been a better scientist than Pierre. You know the old saying, "Behind every good man there is a good [what?] woman." Marie Curie seems to justify the feminist rewrite of this old saying: "Behind every good man there is a *better* woman!"

CONCLUSION

In 1544, in a faraway kingdom, a young prince was about to ascend the throne. But first, he must marry. A royal edict ordered all noble families of that land to escort their eligible daughters to the capital. From the 2,000 highborn ladies who appeared before him, the young prince set his heart upon one, Anastasia. In 1547, they were married; the prince became king, and embraced his dream girl as his queen.

Marvelous things began to happen! It seemed the youthful king and queen, enflamed by their devotion to each other, set out to transform their land into a kingdom of love! A new era began in which the king became a kindly father to his subjects. In 1550, he called a national assembly, the first of its kind, to publicly confess the sins of his youth and to promise the realm should henceforth be governed justly and mercifully. The king became a particular friend of the poor, a humanitarian devoted to charity and the relief of suffering. And he proved to be a godly man, a builder of churches, and a humble ruler who fasted and prayed. In all these efforts, Queen Anastasia encouraged her King. Her tenderness tamed the cruel boy he'd been, her virtue inspired his godliness, and her gracious wisdom provided a moral example for the finest leader this land had ever known. But then the Queen fell ill. The King frantically summoned the best physicians; he wept and prayed. But on a bleak day in 1560, his cherished Anastasia died.

History has almost forgotten the saint this King once was. After 13 years of glory and goodness, this country's most benevolent ruler became its worst nightmare. Twisted by grief, he threw himself into a life of dissipation and drunkenness. He seized former friends; torturing them, impaling them on stakes, or burning them alive. He became a sadistic monster who murdered children; even his own. While Anastasia fulfilled God's highest calling for a woman, she proved to be the most powerful and influential person in the Kingdom; greater even than the czar of Russia, Ivan Vasilyevich, then known as Ivan the Wonderful. Without the light of his beloved Anastasia to guide him, he became a fiend. The man who'd probably been the most beloved ruler in all of Christendom is now known in history by another name, Ivan the Terrible.