

The Bible and the church have been the greatest stumbling blocks in the way of woman's emancipation.

A famous 19th century feminist named Elizabeth Cady Stanton voiced this about her struggle for women's freedom. Women, considered a lower class than the men, wanted this subjugation changed. Part of the reason for the subjugation of women is that the Bible could be interpreted in many different ways to suit the needs of the interpreter. These interpretations of the Bible are in part responsible for the belief that women are of a lower class than men. The reason this belief is present in our society is that approximately 85% of Americans are Judeo-Christian. We see examples of these beliefs when we look at the church, the daily lives of women, and the media. Looking at 1 Timothy 2:11-12, we see why our religious society could interpret the Bible this way:

Let a woman learn in silence with all submission, and do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man, but to be in silence.

We must look at the historical context of the passage. Written approximately 2000 years ago, many parts of the Bible seem outdated. The passage portrays a time when women were property and were "trained" to be weak and fragile. This stopped only about 30 years ago. Before this time, society taught women from birth to be submissive to men. What does this mean to us today? It means that although American Society is no longer training women to be submissive, the problem is still present in our belief system. Many churches do not believe that women should be part of the clergy. This is because they interpret parts of the Bible, such as 1 Timothy 2:11-12, as saying that only men should preach. In 1848, women made a retaliation to these sentiments. At the Seneca Falls convention, women (including Elizabeth Cady Stanton) signed a Declaration of Sentiments. In the declaration it states:

He allows her in church, as well as state, but a subordinate position, claiming apostolic authority for her exclusion from the ministry, and, with some exceptions, from any public participation in the affairs of the church  
(Declaration 1)

The people that these women fought against, including other women, believe that it is the duty of a woman to be quiet and submissive. I have experienced this anti-freedom dogma growing up in the Church of Christ community. I experience this dogma when I talk with my grandmother, a woman who lives by the Word. My grandmother states that I should "be a good girl and keep my mouth shut and clean." She says that if I am quiet and do not tell my opinions, people will like me better that way. My grandmother tries to teach the same submissive qualities that were taught to her when she was young. We, as a society, also see this in media. In the November 5, 1996 airing of the sitcom *Cybil*, the future stepmother of *Cybil*'s daughter was giving advice to the daughter. The advice was that women should let men win

arguments. Cybil, enraged, made told her daughter that she did not have to submit.

Along with the belief that women must be submissive and silent, there is also the belief that women are the cause of men's downfall and therefore are evil. The last two verses we look at talk about the story of the fall of Adam and Eve. In the story of Adam and Eve, God tells Adam and Eve that there is one tree in the garden of which they must not eat. Deceived by the devil, Eve eats fruit from the tree and then persuades Adam to eat it. This act historically displays the deception of man by woman and has put women in a very bad light. I Timothy 2:13-14 states:

For Adam was formed from Eve, and Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived, fell into transgression.

Meant for a different time, the basic belief that women are the cause of men's downfall is obsolete. Some people say that this belief is not present in our society. I have heard men say that the reason that they are "in the mess they are in" is because of women's "folly." Many popular Hollywood movies today reflect these misogynistic attitudes and use themes that portray women as evil and deceiving. In these films, women want nothing else but to destroy men and the order of society. One popular movie called Eve of Destruction, portrays a woman named Eve as a mechanical tool of destruction that destroys anything that gets in her path. The name Eve in this film indicates a link to the Eve of the Bible, connotating treachery and deception and seen as a bane to man's existence.

Not all the Bible portrays women as submissive and evil. Many still believe that women must obey their husbands and live a life of subservience. If people look to this interpretation of the Bible for guidance, women will remain treated as inferior. I am not saying that we need to get rid of the Bible, I am saying that we need to get rid of interpretations of the Bible that are derogatory towards women; like the belief that women are not equal.

