

The Modern Fall of Adam and Eve: A Study of the Evangelical Purity Movement  
through the Lenses of the Fall, Feminism, and the Fairy Tale Narrative

by

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*Certificate of Approval*

This is to certify that the accompanying thesis by Sofia I. Dawson has been accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for graduation with Honors in Religion.

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## Introduction

In late July of 1994, 25,000 teens from the Christian organization True Love Waits staked 211,163 pledge cards on the national mall in Washington D.C. that read, “Believing that true love waits, I make a commitment to God, myself, my family, those I date, my future mate, and my future children to be sexually pure from today until the day I enter a covenant marriage relationship.”<sup>1</sup> These teens, proudly self-identifying as countercultural and revolutionary, wanted to send the world the message that not all teens fall prey to the hypersexualized culture of the U.S. While much of the rest of the country had gradually come to accept sexual activity among teens and sex before marriage as increasing norms since the sexual revolution of the 1960s, evangelicals resisted and actively pushed back against these more lax attitudes on sex. From Phyllis Schlafly’s campaign against the Equal Rights Amendment to today’s abstinence campaigns, evangelicals in the United States have publicly fought to uphold gender roles and sexual relations as they see them outlined in the Bible, two pillars of their faith that they believe the feminist agenda has come to threaten.

Responding to what they perceived as the threats of an over-sexualized culture in which people assume teens are too weak to refuse sex, a small group of teens recited the above pledge for the first time ever in the basement of a Tennessee church in 1993, just sixteen months before the True Love Waits rally in Washington D.C.<sup>2</sup> Like many teens that would come to follow, they were proving their ability to say no to the dominant culture and live a life of integrity before God. Since then, sexual purity has

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<sup>1</sup> Christine J. Gardner, *Making Chastity Sexy: The Rhetoric of Evangelical Abstinence Campaigns* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011), 30; Sara Moslener, *Virgin Nation: Sexual Purity and American Adolescence* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 109.

<sup>2</sup> Moslener, *Virgin Nation*, 109.

become a widespread evangelical movement consisting of purity organizations, websites, blogs, books, magazines, conferences and more, resulting in the contemporary sexual purity movement and a culture broadly referred to as purity culture. For teens living in purity culture, purity has come to mean far more than just sexual abstinence. Living a life of purity means that one must constantly work to guard her or his mind from anything that could lead to lust or temptation. Purity is more than virginity: “It is a lifestyle that requires scrutinizing all one’s innermost thoughts and feelings and working tirelessly to guard oneself from any evidence of improper sexual desires or actions.”<sup>3</sup> This means that teens must monitor the movies and T.V. shows they watch, what they look at on the internet, the way they dress, what they talk about with their friends, how they talk to people of the opposite sex—the list goes on.<sup>4</sup>

The purity movement gives its audience, mainly consisting of teenage boys and girls, many incentives to keep a pure mindset and remain abstinent until marriage. The most important reason most books and organizations give is that living a pure life shows one’s integrity before God. Rejecting the ungodly culture that evangelicals believe they are constantly bombarded by is a sign that individuals are successfully submitting their wills to God’s will, a goal outlined for Christians at least since Augustine wrote *Confessions* in the early fifth century. In addition to this, however, the purity movement promises that a life of purity and abstinence before marriage results not only in a happy marriage, but in a marriage filled with amazing sex. One of the ironic phenomena of the purity movement is that in order to get teens not to have sex,

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<sup>3</sup> Amy DeRogatis, *Saving Sex: Sexuality and Salvation in American Evangelicalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 13.

<sup>4</sup> Dannah Gresh, *And the Bride Wore White: Seven Secrets to Sexual Purity* (Chicago: Moody Press, 2004), 75.

the movement emphasizes how wonderful sex is. As one author puts it: “The new sexy abstinence message is not about the absence of sex; it is about waiting for great sex in marriage,” which turns the message of abstinence from a negative one to a positive one.<sup>5</sup> In addition to traditional Christian messages of submission to God’s will, the purity movement encourages unmarried individuals to resist temptation during their teenage years with the promise of a happy marriage and great sex.

While the purity movement aims its message at both boys and girls, there is much more material targeted at females, ranging in age from girls just learning to read to young women already engaged. There is no doubt that evangelicals have always forbidden sex outside of marriage for both men and women, but judging by the sheer number of purity books existing today aimed at girls rather than boys, there seems to be either far greater value placed on female virginity or far more concern around their ability to become pure. Those within the purity movement do not directly address which one it is, and the questions of whether a young woman’s virginity is more valuable than a young man’s virginity or whether females need more guidance and protection to remain pure are complicated issues even after closely examining the way those within the purity movement address and treat girls and women. When it comes to power—over one’s body, another’s body, one’s mind, another’s mind, and the ability to make responsible decisions—the purity movement’s message for unmarried girls and women is sometimes seemingly contradictory.

One such paradox arises from the fact that despite there being so many more resources available to women on how to remain pure before marriage, many of those same resources assert that boys have a much more difficult time resisting sex. Out of

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<sup>5</sup> Gardner, *Making Chastity Sexy*, 47.

the eight primary sources I used for this research—a combination of books about purity, modesty, masculinity and femininity—all of them at some point state that men struggle with lust and that visual stimulation and lust are inherent parts of being a man. According to the authors of these books, this is simply the way God created men. As Bob Gresh, author of one of the few books aimed at helping teenage boys curb their lust, writes, “God created women to be visually pleasing beyond our wildest dreams. And He created us to crave that beauty.”<sup>6</sup> He argues that “Every man in the universe” struggles to fend off lust and stay in line with “God’s plan for sex.”<sup>7</sup> The idea that men are far more lustful than women and are visually stimulated is not unique to the purity movement, but if lust is something so widely recognized within the movement as an obstacle to both men’s and women’s purity, one wonders why there are not more books directed at young men encouraging them to learn to control their desires. Instead, evangelical authors and purity activists write books for teen girls warning them of teen boys’ lust and how they as young women should act so as not to tempt other males and to earn their respect. The reasoning behind this is that women acting in a godly manner have the power to inspire men to be better. Judging by this strategy, it seems that the purity movement regards females not only as more disciplined and responsible than men, but also as having a great deal of power over them.

Even though it seems that this strategy implies that women have more power over men than men do over them, purity authors tell women that they become empowered by being submissive to God, their fathers, and even other men. The Oxford English Dictionary defines submissive as “yielding to power or authority; humble,

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<sup>6</sup> Bob and Dannah Gresh, *Who Moved the Goalpost? Seven Winning Strategies in the Sexual Integrity Gameplan* (Chicago: Moody Press, 2001), 19.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 15.

obedient.” Authors writing to young women in the purity movement tell them that they become empowered by embracing something that by its very definition is powerless. Authors writing purity books will often admit that this sounds contradictory, but they nonetheless tell the young women reading their books that submission, specifically to God and their fathers, is the key to empowerment and freedom. The coauthors of one book, all sisters, state, “Submission is an expression of absolute power and strength, not of weakness. When we submit to our fathers’ authority, God uses that covering of protection in ways we may not understand at first.”<sup>8</sup> Another book explains, “In a world that emphasizes power, it seems contradictory to us that as we let go of the controls and give them to God, He actually empowers us. But that’s the way He works.”<sup>9</sup> These authors argue that when girls submit to their fathers and to God, they not only receive protection, but through that protection, they achieve true liberation.<sup>10</sup>

The power of female submission goes even further than this. In addition to the protection girls receive from their fathers and from God, being gentle and submissive also inspires young men, those inflicted with uncontrollable lust, to protect and respect girls and young women rather than objectify or devalue them. Quoting psychologist Toni Grant, the coauthors of *Purely Woman*, write, “Feminine ‘soft behaviors’ are tremendously powerful.... These behaviors greatly enhance a woman’s feeling of vulnerability, receptivity, and desirability; these feelings, in turn, inspire high levels of devotion and protection from men.”<sup>11</sup> While women seem to have more power over

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<sup>8</sup> Lauren Wilson Black, Khrystian Wilson Lewis, and Jordyn Wilson, *Purely Woman: Awakening the Heart of God through Pure Living in Our Generation* (Colorado Springs: Generations of Light Publishing, 2009), 176.

<sup>9</sup> Rebecca St. James and Lynda Hunter Bjorklund, *SHE: Safe, Healthy Empowered: The Woman You’re Made to Be* (Wheaton: Tyndale House Publishers, 2004), 16.

<sup>10</sup> DeRogatis, *Saving Sex*, 14.

<sup>11</sup> Black, Lewis and Wilson, *Purely Woman*, 23.

men's actions, their strategies of empowerment actually put the power back into the hands of men by inspiring men to become their protectors. In order to do this, young women must strike the perfect balance of being modest but attractive, submissive but strong, and tender but tough, the implicit message being that men struggle with lust and with understanding how to treat women unless women, especially young unmarried ones, act exactly as they are supposed to. While a man's lust may not disappear, a woman can inspire him to suppress his lust and protect her; implicit in this understanding is a claim that women are more valuable when they suppress their sexuality and submit to the authority of men.

Multiple authors of purity books that bring up the issue of submission express disappointment, frustration, and even panic around the feminist movement simultaneously with or in nearby passages to their discussion of submission. Feminism, they claim, poses a deep threat to a woman's ability to be submissive. They say that feminism hardens women, making them overly independent, harsh, dominating, and, ultimately, unattractive to men. Purity authors frame the feminist movement as encouraging women to seek power by embracing masculinity and conquering men. Jordyn Wilson, coauthor of *Purely Woman*, says, "So many women have believed the lie that power and strength come from rejecting feminine qualities and embracing masculinity."<sup>12</sup> Rebecca St. James, Australian pop star and purity activist, explains in one of her many books on purity that there are multifarious consequences to women embracing this mentality. According to her and her coauthor, feminism is selfish, and it confuses gender roles, threatening the structure of one of society's most fundamental

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 20.

building blocks: the nuclear family.<sup>13</sup> Worst of all, women, and in turn men, believe lies that cause them to act contrary to their God-given nature. In the face of what evangelicals perceive to be a major gender crisis, evangelicals look to Adam and Eve in the garden, before the fall, as the ideal man and woman. John Eldredge, author of a book that encourages men to reclaim what he calls their ‘authentic masculinity,’ even argues that the problems evangelical men and women face from the feminist agenda are a direct result of what the fall did to the nature of men and women.<sup>14</sup>

Despite all the negative language around the feminist agenda, the purity movement actually borrows feminist language of choice and autonomy to appeal to young women and men today. The purity movement self-identifies as countercultural, and books, rallies, and events often emphasize this when appealing to young people. They proudly admit that while a life of purity is the most rewarding, it is a battle against the dominant culture that one must be strong enough to fight. They market directly to young people rather than through their parents or superiors, sending young people, and especially young females, the message that they are strong enough to choose and to fight for a life of purity. Christine Gardner, author of *Making Chastity Sexy: The Rhetoric of Evangelical Abstinence Campaigns*, states, “American evangelicals appear to be borrowing a central argument of secular society: they are recasting an essentially feminist argument of ‘my body, my choice’ and persuading teenagers that they are choice-making individuals who can control their bodies and

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<sup>13</sup> St. James and Bjorklund, *SHE*, 65-69.

<sup>14</sup> John Eldredge, *Wild at Heart: Discovering the Secret of a Man's Soul* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2001), 50-59, 184, 217.

wait for sex.”<sup>15</sup> The purity movement, therefore, is both an outgrowth of the women’s movement and something that claims to stand in direct opposition to its message.

The purity movement often cites the classic fairy tale narrative as an example of what relationships between men and women should look like, and examining this central narrative in the purity movement helps one understand not only evangelicals’ idea of what constitutes an ideal relationship but also how evangelicals have come to see the fairy tale narrative as a source of salvation. The narrative addresses the specific problems that evangelicals identify in today’s treatment of gender: it encourages men to be more masculine and assertive, something they believe many men have increasingly lost, and it encourages women to be feminine, submissive, and willing to be swept off their feet rather than hardened and overly independent. By encouraging men and women to embrace their God-given masculinity and femininity, the fairy tale not only ameliorates what evangelicals see as a fallen state of gender, but precisely by saving gender, it saves an entire generation from leading a sinful life. What emerges as especially interesting from an examination of the purity movement’s use of the fairy tale is the princess character, for despite her passive role, it is with her that the success or failure of the story resides.

At this point one can see that there are a number of apparent contradictions behind the purity movement’s initially simple message of abstinence. The movement tells teenage girls to be submissive to the men in their lives but also tries to appeal to their sense of autonomy and sense of control over their bodies. Men, controlled by their lust, are major threats to women’s purity while they are simultaneously supposed to be their protectors. These observations lead one to wonder how it is that the purity

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<sup>15</sup> Gardner, *Making Chastity Sexy*, 14.

movement is able to present the power relations between females and males in these ways. How is it that the men in young women's lives are both major threats to a life of purity yet also their protectors, and what kind of power do women ultimately have over their bodies? Answering these questions requires looking back further than the 1960s sexual revolution and women's movement, the causes to which the purity movement and scholars who write about the movement generally claim it is responding, and it also requires examining evangelicals' current understanding of gender roles and the theological implications for evangelicals living in a society in which these specific ideas about gender do not predominate.

Throughout my research, I was primarily concerned with *how* the strategies employed by the purity movement could produce such a complex and in some ways convoluted representation of female power, but as I continued reading and analyzing my primary sources, I found myself starting to explain *why* people in the purity movement use strategies that emphasize female power and autonomy but simultaneously require female submission and male authority. There exists an overarching theological component that, situated in the contemporary context of American popular culture, helps to make sense of what I observed. The story of the fall of Adam and Eve was replaying in modern American culture for evangelicals: today, Satan is once again tempting women through the feminist agenda, and the consequences of falling for his lies are just as colossal as they were in Eden. If women fall for his lies just as they fell for his lies in the garden, women today have the capacity to endanger all of humanity, not only by failing to be mothers and wives who monitor the well-being of the nuclear family, but also by failing to be young women

who adequately inspire young men to be good Christians. The purity movement's fixation on female empowerment may come primarily from the fact that the purity movement is catering to a generation that has been influenced by the women's movement fight for gender equality, but the idea that women are in control of how the story ends, for better or for worse, predates the feminist movement and goes all the way back to the responsibility and failure of Eve in Eden. Rooted in the fall of Adam and Eve but playing out in the face of feminism, the purity movement borrows feminist rhetoric of choice and empowerment to encourage women to embrace a demeanor of gentle submission. Because of this effort to be culturally relevant through its delivery while self-identifying as countercultural through its message and goals, the purity movement sends seemingly paradoxical messages to women about their autonomy and power in relation to the men in their lives.

## **Methods**

Moslener's book, one of two books I know of that focuses entirely on the purity movement, follows the broader historical trajectory to understand why the movement is so popular today. The other book written about the purity movement is Christine J. Gardner's *Making Chastity Sexy*, which explores the rhetoric of abstinence campaigns to understand "how young people are negotiating their sexuality while remaining abstinent."<sup>16</sup> Compared to these two authors, I, too, look at the rhetoric and history of the purity movement, but I focus more narrowly on the complex power dynamics that the purity movement encourages between young men and women and explore how and

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<sup>16</sup> Gardner, *Making Chastity Sexy*, 6.

why this rhetoric exists and thrives.<sup>17</sup> In doing this, I focused my research mainly on purity books written from the year 1995 and onwards. I started by choosing books that other scholars writing on the purity movement referenced such as *And the Bride Wore White: Seven Secrets to Sexual Purity* by Dannah Gresh and *Wait for Me: Rediscovering the Joy of Purity in Romance* by Rebecca St. James. I then chose additional books written and coauthored by these two women on the subject of purity, modesty and/or womanhood. These books include *Who Moved the Goalpost: Seven Strategies to the Sexual Integrity Gameplan* by Dannah Gresh and her husband Bob Gresh, *Secret Keeper: The Delicate Power of Modesty* by Dannah Gresh, and *SHE: Safe, Healthy, Empowered: The Woman You're Made to Be* by St. James and Lynda Bjorklund. Another book I used because Gardner and scholar Amy DeRogatis discuss it in their books is the children's book *The Princess and the Kiss: A Story of God's Gift of Purity* by Jennie Bishop.

I also used the book *Purely Woman: Awakening the Heart of God through Pure Living in Our Generation* written by three sisters who come from the family that started doing father-daughter purity balls. In these ceremonies, girls as young as five pledge to remain virgins until marriage, and their fathers pledge to protect their daughters' virginity. I did not end up writing extensively on this subject, but father-daughter purity balls are one of the more public and controversial aspects of purity culture that originally caught my attention. I therefore elected to use the book that the Wilson sisters wrote about purity.

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<sup>17</sup> Gardner's book studies the rhetoric of the purity movement mainly through abstinence campaigns while I study the rhetoric of the campaigns mainly through purity books.

The last primary source I decided to use is actually not a book about purity or even aimed at women. Rather, it is a book for men written about a perceived crisis in masculinity. I read John Eldredge's *Wild at Heart: Discovering the Secret of a Man's Soul* because purity books such as *SHE: Safe, Healthy, Empowered* cited it. I found that using a book written by a man and for men that discusses gender to such an extent was actually very helpful in dissecting and understanding the power dynamics between men and women in the purity movement. Together, these eight books comprised my main subjects of research. Using books and documentaries about the purity movement, an understanding of evangelical culture and theology, and other secondary sources on gender and feminism, I analyzed what my primary sources were saying, their underlying assumptions, and their implicit messages.

## **Chapter 1: Historical and Theological Background of Evangelicalism in the United States**

The purity movement is a movement rooted in evangelicalism. The people involved with the movement—the authors writing purity books, the teens attending True Love Waits rallies, the families attending father daughter purity balls—identify, for the most part, as evangelical Christians. Because the movement is rooted in evangelicalism, it is important to understand both evangelical theology as well as a brief history of evangelicalism in the U.S. Evangelicals believe that when Adam and Eve committed the first sin, humanity fell away from God and stood in need of salvation through Christ. Evangelicals today stress that humanity is in a state of total depravity, meaning that every individual is born into a fallen and sinful state from which only the grace of God can save them. Evangelicals spend their lives trying to deny their own sinful nature, and the purity movement serves as one example of evangelicals doing their best to both submit to God’s will and to evangelize non-Christians around them. The purity movement, therefore, acts as a means of salvation for evangelicals who believe that the rest of the U.S. is heading towards damnation, an especially interesting point when examined in the context of the purity movement’s origins, which actually lie with liberal Protestantism. While purity activists today are generally more conservative Christians who believe that sexual purity and traditional gender roles have the potential to save people tempted by modern U.S. culture and feminist ideals, the early purity reformers of the early twentieth century were liberal Protestants who used women’s perceived natural sexual morality to assert feminine ideals into society and boost women’s status in society. This chapter examines how

sexual purity went from being associated with first wave feminism to something directly challenging ideas coming out of second wave feminism. Additionally, I have provided a brief history of evangelicals here along with an overview of evangelical theology to help in beginning to understand the deeper theological implications of the purity movement and the complex power dynamics between young Christian men and women.

### **Early History: From the Protestant Reformation to the Great Awakening**

Historically, the term evangelical has referred to the theology of the Protestant Reformation of the sixteenth century.<sup>18</sup> The Protestants claimed that anyone could have a personal relationship with God that was accessible through Scripture rather than through a church hierarchy. Protestantism has taken many forms since the Reformation over four centuries ago, but the idea of individual access to God and Jesus through the Bible remains a core element of evangelicalism today. Evangelicalism today, however, moves beyond the Reformation's original call for individual access to God. Mark Noll, an American religious historian, points to a period in English history in the mid-seventeenth century when Protestants yearned for an even more personal and emotional form of Christianity.<sup>19</sup> According to him, "The most overt religious factor in the transformation of Protestantism was spiritual renewal expressed as a multifaceted protest against ecclesiastical formalism and an urgent appeal for living religion of the heart. The form of Christianity that contemporary Americans recognize as

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<sup>18</sup> Randall Balmer, *Mine Eyes Have Seen the Glory: A Journey into the Evangelical Subculture in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), xv.

<sup>19</sup> Mark A. Noll, *American Evangelical Christianity: An Introduction* (Malden: Blackwell Publishers, 2001), 9.

evangelicalism originated in this pietistic revival.”<sup>20</sup> What resulted from this desire for a “living religion of the heart” were religious revivals in British Colonies and Great Britain in the eighteenth century known as the first Great Awakening. Present at these revivals were talented and captivating preachers and, most notably, dramatic conversion experiences. People published accounts of ordinary men and women transformed and awakened through intense and sudden conversion experiences. In London in 1738 John Wesley wrote in his journal, “I felt my heart strangely warmed. I felt I did trust in Christ, Christ alone for salvation; and assurance was given me that He had taken away *my* sins, even *mine*, and saved *me*, from the law of sin and death.”<sup>21</sup> Men and women alike spoke of similar intimate experiences with God, and revivals swept through the North Atlantic. These evangelical revivals did not create a new religion, for those awakened usually did not change their beliefs from earlier British Protestantism, but “the eighteenth-century English-speaking evangelical awakening still created a distinct set of new emphases in the Christian world.”<sup>22</sup> An intense and emotional religion of the heart had seized a significant population that would eventually become the American evangelical subculture.

## **Core Shared Beliefs among Evangelicals**

Evangelicalism has gone through significant cultural changes since the eighteenth century revivals, but the first Great Awakening created a “distinct set of new

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Nehemiah Curnock, ed. *The Journal of John Wesley*, 8 vols (London: Epworth, 1938), volume 1, 475-76, qtd. in Noll, *American Evangelical Christianity*, 11 (italics Noll’s).

<sup>22</sup> Noll, *American Evangelical Christianity*, 12.

emphases” that are still part of evangelicalism today.<sup>23</sup> According to many scholars writing on evangelical Christianity today, among those emphases is a focus on social conservatism, and scholars will generally use “evangelical” as an umbrella term that refers broadly to conservative Protestants.<sup>24</sup> The term crosses over different denominations and includes Methodists, Baptists, Presbyterians, Episcopalians, Pentecostals, Lutherans, Congregationalists, and more. The term ‘evangelical’ also refers to the worldwide evangelical population. In fact, according to the *World Christian Encyclopedia*, the number of evangelicals in Africa, Latin America and Asia exceeds the total number of evangelicals in Europe and North America combined.<sup>25</sup> Noll states, “Evangelical traits have never by themselves yielded cohesive, institutionally compact, or clearly demarcated groups of Christians. But they do serve to identify a large family of churches and religious enterprises.”<sup>26</sup> Evangelicals worldwide and in various denominations hold beliefs distinct to one another and may practice differently, but all evangelicals generally adhere to a certain set of beliefs that evangelicals began to emphasize during eighteenth century religious revivals.

The historian David Bebbington suggests that the four core beliefs of evangelicalism include conversionism, biblicalism, crucicentricism, and activism.<sup>27</sup>

Conversionism is the idea that a spiritual rebirth, also known as a “born again” experience, in which someone acknowledges the need to turn away from one’s own

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Balmer, *Mine Eyes Have Seen the Glory*, xviii; Emily Murphy Cope and Jeffrey M. Ringer, “Coming to (Troubled) Terms: Methodology, Positionality, and the Problem of Defining ‘Evangelical Christian,’” in *Mapping Christian Rhetorics: Connecting Conversations, Charting New Territories*, ed. Michael-John DePalma and Jeffrey M. Ringer (New York: Routledge, 2014), 107; DeRogatis, *Saving Sex*, 7.

<sup>25</sup> Mark A. Noll, “What is ‘Evangelical?,”” in *The Oxford Handbook of Evangelical Theology*, ed. Gerald R. McDermott (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 20.

<sup>26</sup> Noll, *American Evangelical Christianity*, 13.

<sup>27</sup> David Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s* (New York: Routledge, 1989), qtd. in Mark A. Noll, “What is ‘Evangelical?,”” 21.

sinful nature and towards God, is necessary for one's salvation. Biblicalism means, "evangelicals may respect church traditions in varying degrees and may use schooling, reason, and science to assist in explaining Christianity, but the ultimate authority for all matters of faith and religious practice is the Christian Scriptures."<sup>28</sup> Crucicentricism points to Jesus' death on the cross and his subsequent resurrection as the heart of the Christian message, signifying Christ's sacrifice on behalf of sinful humans. Lastly, activism points to evangelicals' sense of duty to spread the news of the gospels via evangelism and to their tendency to take part in charity or social reform "because of their own experience of God."<sup>29</sup> Although not all Christians who affirm these four beliefs identify as evangelical, this fourfold definition still helps to identify the main beliefs of those who do identify as evangelical.

Today there seems to be special emphasis on the "born again" aspect of evangelical identity, to the point where evangelicals are sometimes referred to simply as born again Christians. Evangelicals derive the born again experience from a passage in the gospel of John. In the New International Version of the Bible, an evangelical translation, Jesus says, "Very truly, I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God unless they are born again."<sup>30</sup> Evangelicals today take this experience to be one in which people accept their sinful nature and acknowledge that Christ's atonement is essential for salvation. Eighteenth century revivalists often described intense moments of conversion like the one John Wesley had, clearly demarcating one's spiritual life before and after conversion. It continues to be this way for some evangelicals today,

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> John 3:3. All other passages quoted from the Bible will be from the New Revised Standard Version of the Bible.

but for others “it is a longer process of growing in faith to an acceptance of the spiritual truths of sin, redemption, and salvation.”<sup>31</sup> Either way, evangelicals believe that people must consciously have this conversion experience in order for God to save and redeem them. The idea that humans are inherently sinful and stand in need of a conversion experience and God’s salvation underlies most of what purity authors have to say about sexual purity. Because people are inherently sinful, they struggle with lust and temptation. Though evangelicals believe that they can never perfect themselves to the point of no sin, the purity movement aims to help people with the inevitable inner struggles they face.

### **Early Twentieth Century: The First Purity Reformers and Changing Conceptions of Gender**

Understanding the path that evangelicalism has taken in the United States throughout the twentieth century and its relationship to the rest of American culture is important for understanding the implications of the contemporary purity movement. While evangelicalism has generally always referred to those who emphasize “personal conversion, the authority of Scripture, their belief in the imminent return of Christ, and their desire to spread the gospel,” evangelicalism has also always been “diverse, flexible, adaptable, and multiform.”<sup>32</sup> One area where evangelical beliefs have changed over time is in the realm of gender and their ideas regarding what constitutes both innate and ideal femininity and masculinity. At the turn of the twentieth century, some Christians in the U.S. felt so strongly about these differences regarding gender that these beliefs played a major role in the split between evangelicals, fundamentalists, and

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<sup>31</sup> DeRogatis, *Saving Sex*, 7.

<sup>32</sup> DeRogatis, *Saving Sex*, 7; Noll, *American Evangelical Christianity*, 14.

liberal Protestants. The division between evangelicals, fundamentalists, and liberal Protestant Christians is not always entirely clear, but fundamentalists have tended to promote more literal interpretations of the Bible and a more separatist mentality. Liberal Protestants, on the other hand, use the principle of *sola scriptura* less radically than conservative evangelicals and fundamentalists, and they rely on their own human experience in addition to Scripture. All three groups, however, have their roots in revivalism.

While evangelical revivalism had seized the country in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, its influence was waning at the beginning of the twentieth century, and men especially had lost interest in the emotional pursuit of religion. According to Noll, “Evangelical cultural influence had, in fact, been declining for several decades owing to the large-scale immigration of non-Protestants, the growth of cities as multicultural sites, and the secularization of university learning.”<sup>33</sup> When it came specifically to men, however, Christianity in the eyes of many had come to be a highly feminized practice and institution. It had not always been this way, but when both men and women attended the eighteenth century revivals, revivalists encouraged women to take part in activities that they had never been a part of before such as giving public testimonies of conversion experiences, joining prayer assemblies, and joining missionary societies.<sup>34</sup> For women, revivals and conversion gave them a sense of power and access to the larger world.<sup>35</sup> More and more women turned to religion, not only changing the image of the church into something more feminine, but also

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 15.

<sup>34</sup> Margaret Lamberts Bendroth, *Fundamentalism and Gender, 1875 to the Present* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), 15.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

changing certain conceptions of femininity and womanhood. Historically, “Christian theology has often regarded women as temptresses, the descendants of Eve, the inheritors of a wicked, seductive sensuality that could be tempered only through their subordination to men.”<sup>36</sup> As more women responded to the eighteenth and nineteenth century revivals and women joined churches in greater numbers than men, however, this mindset began to shift, and Christians began to regard women as uniquely tender and loving, and as spiritually superior to men.<sup>37</sup>

As the rhetoric around women and their natural tendencies changed, Christians began to view women as generally morally superior to men. According to Sara Moslener, for Protestants this change in mindset was in part due to an effort to relieve their anxieties around men leaving the house to work in more urban industrial societies at the turn of the twentieth century.<sup>38</sup> If women could reliably be the moral arbiters of the home, nurturing children and maintaining the domestic sanctuary, men felt better about leaving their homes.<sup>39</sup> By the early twentieth century, feminine piety and involvement with the church reached such a high level, with American churches being two-thirds female in 1910, that many men viewed religion as a predominantly female endeavor.<sup>40</sup> Men often felt “distinctively uncomfortable” in the realm of religion.<sup>41</sup> It was in this context of exalted female piety and men’s relative disengagement with religion that a number of Protestant women sought to assert their moral authority beyond the confines of their home. With the idea of natural female piety and morality

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<sup>36</sup> Randall Balmer, *Blessed Assurance* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1999), 74.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>38</sup> Moslener, *Virgin Nation*, 16.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>40</sup> L. Dean Allen, *Rise Up, O Men of God: The “Men and the Religion Forward Movement” and the “Promise Keepers”* (Macon: Mercer University Press, 2002), 41.

<sup>41</sup> Bendroth, *Fundamentalism and Gender*, 17.

in mind, the first purity reformers started the original purity movement around the turn of the twentieth century by trying to extend the standard of female purity to men.<sup>42</sup>

The first purity reformers were therefore outspoken women who were part of first wave feminism. Not only were they gender egalitarians “who believed that a civilized society required a single standard of sexual behavior,” but they were also expanding the ideals of womanhood by seeking “to relocate women’s domestic piety to the public sphere.”<sup>43</sup> Sexual purity, therefore, was originally associated with liberal and progressive Protestantism, “not because conservatives didn’t value sexual restraint and deplore sexual promiscuity, but because the purity movement had its theological foundation in liberal Protestantism.”<sup>44</sup> This would eventually change with the emergence of Billy Graham in the mid-century, but early in the twentieth century, it was progressive Protestants, not fundamentalists, who fiercely promoted sexual purity. For liberal Protestants, sexual purity acted as a platform to create social change here on earth and demonstrated their optimism about the direction of humanity. The purity movement today, on the other hand, perceives sexual purity as a way of achieving salvation for evangelicals living in a society that they believe is heading towards sin and destruction.

As women continued to have a larger presence in churches than men, and to publicly involve themselves with sexual purity reform and other causes such as women’s suffrage and the temperance movement, some men reacted with discomfort to women’s more public and influential roles. Men organized movements such as the Men and Religion Forward Movement, which sought to reassert masculinity not only back

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<sup>42</sup> Moslener, *Virgin Nation*, 17.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 17, 18.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 36.

into religion but also back into what they perceived to be an increasingly effeminate society. After years of women bolstering their own position by pointing to the moral failings of men, many Christian men felt it was time for them to reclaim their religious authority. In pushing back on what they perceived to be an overly feminine society and seeking to reassert natural male integrity, men involved in this effort asserted a certain masculine ideal that came to be known as muscular Christianity. Muscular Christianity was comprised of four ideals—manliness, morality, health, and patriotism—and this movement and these ideals became an important rallying point for men.<sup>45</sup> At a time when purity activists promoted feminine morals because they saw men as inherently lustful and undisciplined, muscular Christianity called men toward what in their evaluation was a more noble kind of masculinity—one that encouraged them to protect women and master their baser selves.<sup>46</sup> Muscular Christianity encouraged men to resist sexual temptations by exercising restraint and discipline that would in turn protect women.

Even though liberal Protestants and purity activists promoted muscular Christianity, fundamentalists, who in the early twentieth century were consciously trying to separate themselves from liberal Protestants, also reacted positively to the idea. While liberal Protestant men wanted to remain manly and authoritative in their new roles as capitalist men functioning in a market economy after having been the leaders of their homes in more rural and isolated areas, fundamentalists felt that it was their biblical mandate to reassert their authority and leadership over women.<sup>47</sup>

Fundamentalists agreed with the Victorian idea of separate spheres that valued

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 22.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 25.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 57.

women's domesticity and piety, but they believed that claims of women's natural religiousness and therefore possible moral superiority to men threatened the natural order of creation. By the 1920s, fundamentalist men took advantage of the ideas of muscular Christianity and female natural vulnerability in a more aggressive way than liberal Protestants to confirm their positions as rightful religious leaders.

Fundamentalists, disillusioned with popular culture and the direction that liberal Protestantism was heading, gained momentum by the 1920s as a separate group of Christians who held tightly to traditional evangelical doctrines.<sup>48</sup> They were largely uninvolved in American public life from the Great Depression to the Second World War, but when Billy Graham, a Christian fundamentalist, came onto the evangelical scene in the late 1940s, his charismatic power was able to move evangelicalism past the fundamentalist-modernist walls that had been built after the famous Scopes Trial<sup>49</sup> in 1925.<sup>50</sup> This caused some fundamentalists to reject Graham because they believed he was wrong to try to unite fundamentalists with more liberal Christians. Indeed, Graham's emergence in the 1940s marks a moment when fundamentalism and conservative evangelicalism diverge into two separate groups of Christians, the former promoting a more separatist mentality and the latter claiming to be in the world but not

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<sup>48</sup> George M. Marsden, *Understanding Fundamentalism and Evangelicalism* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co, 1991), 3.

<sup>49</sup> The Scopes Trial, officially called *The State of Tennessee vs. John Thomas Scopes*, occurred in 1924 when Tennessee, along with multiple other Southern states, passed a bill that prohibited public schools from teaching evolution. When people found out that John Scopes, a young biology teacher in Tennessee, was teaching evolution, he was brought to trial. Scopes was found guilty of teaching evolution, but the trial has gone down in history as a great clash of two worlds: the rural and the urban. Moreover, it is seen as a great victory for the urban and more modern population. The most infamous part of the trial is the cross-examination of William Jennings Bryan, a fierce opponent of Darwinism, by one of the greatest trial lawyers of the day. In this cross-examination, the lawyer "forced Bryan into admitting that he could not answer the standard village-atheist type questions regarding the literal interpretation of Scripture." After the trial, people associated the term "Fundamentalism" with small town, rural Protestantism that actively resisted modernization. George M. Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 184-88.

<sup>50</sup> Moslener, *Virgin Nation*, 18.

of it. Graham was able to bring conservative evangelicalism back into mainstream culture both through his charisma and by distancing himself from the less intellectual and more militant fundamentalists. He also emphasized to men that “Christianity [did] not require the compromise of their God-given, masculine traits,” ensuring that even though he was bringing conservative evangelicalism into mainstream American culture and further away from isolated fundamentalists, he still valued masculinity and separate spheres.<sup>51</sup>

### **National Security, Feminism, and the Nuclear Family**

Sara Moslener points out that Graham emerged as a very important precursor to the contemporary purity movement because he made sexual immorality a public issue again by linking it to national decline and impending apocalypse.<sup>52</sup> Graham focused on the threat of communism and nuclear war in his earlier speeches, but by the 1970s, he was far more focused on the family, parenting and sexuality, and he would link these to the threat of national decline.<sup>53</sup> Throughout the 1960s and 70s many evangelicals were not concerned with issues of sexuality such as abortion and homosexuality, but when politicians and religious leaders like Billy Graham argued that these were threats to national security because of the threat they posed to the traditional family, mindsets changed. Moslener argues that it was conservative politicians’ strategic framing of the traditional family as essential to the safety of the nation that caused evangelicals to become involved with conservative activism.<sup>54</sup> Once evangelicals were in line with the conservative political agenda, they saw young people as the most vulnerable area of

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 58.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 9.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 87.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 83.

society, “whose innocence and promise of moral fortitude could be usurped by premarital sex or homosexuals who preyed upon the young.”<sup>55</sup> Conservative evangelicals came to believe that liberal ideas coming from the sexual revolution and feminist movement that tolerated premarital sex, abortion, and homosexuality had the potential to corrupt innocent young minds and prevent them from going on to create nuclear families that served as the cornerstone of American society and safety. It is this concern for the family that carried over to the 1990s contemporary purity movement. Moslener argues, “The evangelical purity culture has grown up around the belief that certain sexual practices are threatening to the nation’s moral and spiritual trajectory.”<sup>56</sup> Evangelicals in the United States came to perceive their values as critical to saving the nation from immorality and danger. While sexual purity was once a platform for liberal Protestant women to assert their value in society, sexual purity has today become a major issue for conservative evangelicals who fear the destruction of society through the breakdown of the nuclear family. While conservative evangelicals, similar to the liberal Protestants in the early twentieth century, assert that women have a certain natural tenderness and sexual restraint, the purity movement is no longer focused on incorporating feminine morality into society. Rather, through somewhat circuitous strategies, the purity movement uses what they believe is innate female tenderness and moral conduct to motivate and inspire men to protect women, ensuring that they do not represent women as overly powerful. The contemporary purity movement also differs in another key way from the early twentieth century purity movement, in that it is a reaction to the feminist movement and the sexual revolution of

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<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 85.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., 156.

the 1960s and 70s. Those involved in the movement are therefore very careful about how they present female power, stressing that women have a great deal of power over men and the future of the nuclear family but also that female power comes from women's submission, an assertion that directly challenges the ideas coming out of the feminist movement.

## Chapter 2: Feminism

“You are in control of your gate. You’re the one who decides who and what belong inside and outside your life-fence. You’re the one who makes—and enforces—the rules of entrance.”<sup>57</sup> This passage comes from Rebecca St. James and Lynda Hunter Bjorklund’s book *SHE: Safe, Healthy, Empowered: The Woman You’re Made to Be* and appears in a section dedicated to empowering women. Here, the authors are instructing women on how to be firm in drawing boundaries in their lives and being in charge of their decisions; they are telling their female readers to be autonomous, strong, choice-making individuals. St. James and Bjorklund are not the only authors in the purity movement encouraging women to be this way. In fact, in the purity movement in general, many authors, bloggers, participants, and supporters of purity culture claim to promote female empowerment. Even authors such as John Eldredge, who writes books mainly concerned with the threats against masculinity, make some mention of women needing the right encouragement to feel strong and empowered.<sup>58</sup> Whether it is men writing for men, women writing for women, or men writing for women, conservative Christians everywhere agree that women deserve to feel empowered but that something about the dominant culture is preventing this from happening. It is ironic, then, that the very force the purity movement identifies as preventing women’s empowerment also claims to offer women freedom and empowerment, and sees the purity movement as the real inhibitor of that empowerment. The purity movement has marked feminism, specifically the women’s

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<sup>57</sup> St. James and Bjorklund, *SHE*, 170.

<sup>58</sup> Eldredge, *Wild at Heart*, 192.

movement that gained momentum in the 1960s and 1970s, as one of its main opposing forces in accomplishing its goals of transforming dominant American culture through premarital celibacy and performance of biblical gender roles. Despite shared goals of female empowerment, choice, and autonomy, the purity movement has marked feminism as the work of Satan trying to spread his lies. Just as Satan tempted Eve in the garden with lies and temptation, the purity culture believes that Satan today works through the feminist movement to tempt women with more lies and the lure of false power and sexual freedom.<sup>59</sup>

### **Feminism According to Purity Culture**

Only two of the primary sources I used specifically address and denounce feminism, but most of the other primary sources imply that feminism and the sexual revolution are the root causes of what they believe is a hypersexualized American culture. The authors of purity books discuss the evils and temptations in “our culture” or “popular culture” and explain that today, more than ever, people treat sex casually, women dress provocatively, women are overly tough and independent, and men are confused about how to be masculine. Some authors do not explicitly denounce feminism, but their belief that one’s attitudes about sex determine one’s worth, especially for women, directly challenge ideas coming out of the feminist movement. On the other hand, authors such as St. James, Bjorklund, and the Wilson Sisters, all female authors writing to a female audience, explicitly point to feminism as the root

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<sup>59</sup> Sara Moslener argues that the purity movement is not simply a reaction to 1960s feminism and requires consider a deeper historical trajectory that takes into account earlier purity activists, cold war era politics and the development of the very idea of adolescence. While the purity movement probably exists for reasons more complicated than a reaction to feminism, the fact that the purity movement traces itself to feminism is an argument worth exploring. Moslener, *Virgin Nation*, 156.

cause of many of the problems that the purity movement is trying to combat. As with other perceived evils in the world, these authors assert that Satan is directly behind the messages of feminism and the sexual revolution.

St. James and Bjorklund tell a quick and simplified version of the history of feminism in the United States. The authors frame feminism as beginning with Betty Friedan's *Feminine Mystique*, published in 1963, that brought to attention the "problem that has no name," which left women feeling incomplete and stifled, unable to reach their full potential beyond any role in the home. Contrary to what one might predict authors in purity culture to say, Bjorklund and St. James do not claim that women were not stifled, that they were not held back by the structure of American society, or that "the problem that has no name" was simply women's inability to find satisfaction in an area of life where they should have been content. They state, "By the 1960s, more women were going to college more than ever before, yet women who remained at home with their family received little respect, and those who went into the workplace were treated as inferior to men."<sup>60</sup> They make no claim that women should not be in the workplace, and it seems implicit that they believe women *should* be treated equally to men outside of the home. Based on the way that they frame the state of American culture at the time that Friedan's book came out, it seems they believe that change in a more equitable direction was rightly underway for women. What they believe started out as a noble effort to promote equality between men and women, however, went terribly wrong according to their retelling. Conservative evangelicals had, and still have, a very different idea of what exactly equality between men and women should look like from what many feminists envisioned.

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<sup>60</sup> St. James and Bjorklund, *SHE*, 66.

Although these authors suggest that women deserved better treatment in the 1960s, they believe that feminists were far off in their assessment of women's state at the time. They frame feminist beliefs as ideas that "pose women as the victims of white, oppressive males, and the culture as a hotbed of gender discrimination, sexual harassment, and misogyny," which St. James and Bjorklund believe was, and is, a gross misrepresentation of the actual state of American culture.<sup>61</sup> St. James and Bjorklund do not articulate what exactly was wrong with the treatment of women, and what constituted the lack of respect women received in the 1960s, but St. James and Bjorklund are clear that they believe secular feminists misjudged what the real problem was and took feminism in a misguided and immoral direction. St. James and Bjorklund believe that had the church and more Christians been ready for changes in the treatment of and attitude towards women when the *Feminine Mystique* came out, they would have been able to guide feminism in a godly and therefore moral direction. They did not, however, and they believe that feminism took a turn for the worse with ideas such as legalizing abortion and "the philosophy that, except for physical variations, there were no differences between men and women."<sup>62</sup> According to St. James and Bjorklund, because the church missed its window of opportunity to affect the direction of feminism, Satan has successfully spread his lies, and "As a result, feminism has affected and confused women, men, and children."<sup>63</sup> From their perspective, feminism has not just misguided women, but it has also negatively affected all areas of society.

Bjorklund and St. James list multiple ways in which they believe feminism has negatively influenced multiple facets of society and the everyday lives of the women

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<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

reading their book. According to them, feminism has “dulled society’s sense of right and wrong”; they cite pro-choice abortion activists’ use of the words “fetus” and “blob” as evidence of these dulled senses.<sup>64</sup> They also claim that feminism has “created a victim mentality, which shifts the blame and negates accountability.”<sup>65</sup> This echoes Phyllis Schlafley’s argument, from when she worked to oppose the Equal Rights Amendment, that women are not victims of a patriarchal system and only self-impose this victimhood.<sup>66</sup> Along these lines is St. James and Bjorklund’s argument that feminism has “painted biblical standards of morality as yet one more example of oppression,” a form of oppression they claim is fabricated by feminists who spin a web of lies and intimidate people from speaking out against those lies.<sup>67</sup> They compare the oppression that feminists speak of to an invisible cloak that deceptive weavers trick everyone into believing is real.<sup>68</sup>

Perhaps what St. James, Bjorklund, and other purity authors believe is the worst of all the pitfalls of feminism is the selfish mentality they believe it promotes. While they believe the feminist movement had the potential to turn into a positive force that promoted the good of all through placing more equal value on men and women in their complementary roles, according to St. James and Bjorklund, “feminism has grown to be selfish in nature and is concerned more with the wants and needs of the individual than of the whole, thus distorting its positive potential. The focus of ultrafeminism is not the good of humanity or even the good of the average American woman.”<sup>69</sup> Rather

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<sup>64</sup> Ibid., 67.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., 68.

<sup>66</sup> Barak Goodman, *Makers: Women Who Make America*, DVD, (PBS, 2013).

<sup>67</sup> St. James and Bjorklund, *SHE*, 68.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., 66.

than focusing on the greater good of society, which they believe the purity movement does, they believe feminism encourages women to think only about themselves. As an example they state, “In droves, women are leaving their marriage and God-given responsibilities and focusing, instead, on the grass-is-greener promise touted by culture.”<sup>70</sup> If nothing else, purity authors believe that feminism clearly opposes the godly order of life by encouraging women to abandon their God-given responsibilities as mothers and wives in response to feminists’ false arguments that those roles are oppressive and meaningless. As conservative evangelical authors, St. James and Bjorklund say that they wrote their book *because* many women are indeed unhappy in their roles as mothers and wives, but escaping these roles is not the solution in their view. Rather, women must find ways to inhabit their traditional roles with greater authority and purpose by becoming more godly individuals and understanding what God wants them to accomplish. Starting with building a strong relationship with God, St. James and Bjorklund, along with many other purity advocates, believe that learning how to be feminine as God intended women to be will result in the kind of freedom and happiness that both they and feminists want women to have.

## **Feminism and Femininity**

In addition to the above reasons, and perhaps the root cause of many of them, the reason feminism is failing so many women, according to purity activists, is because it encourages women to act contrary to their nature. As the previous chapter explained, conservative evangelicals today have a very specific idea of what God designed men and women be like, which is in part the result of the way they interpret the fall.

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<sup>70</sup> Ibid., 67.

However, the spread of feminist ideals in the 1970s also undoubtedly had an impact on the way evangelicals envision the ideal man and woman. Moslener explains that throughout the 1960s and into the 1970s, many evangelicals were in support of gender equality and even legal abortion, but that changed when politicians strategically organized conservative evangelicals “into an activist voting block whose primary concern was for the survival of an increasingly besieged cultural institution: the nuclear family.”<sup>71</sup> As the secular culture around them loosened its morals and young people’s actions seemed “rooted in a desire for antinomian chaos,”—apparent in the rising normalcy of divorce, homosexuality, premarital sex, and abortion—this generation of evangelicals put an emphasis on “biblical literalism, apocalypticism, and strict moral codes.”<sup>72</sup> This, in turn, led to an obsession with preserving the traditional nuclear family, which they came to embrace as essential to social stability. Moslener argues, “Evangelicals who worked to reestablish traditional values in the face of what they saw as an increasingly oppositional secular culture believed themselves to be working in the best interest of the nation. Moral codes derived from the Bible were a functional map for a secure and thriving nation.”<sup>73</sup> This line of thought continues to be prevalent among conservative evangelicals today. Even though many purity authors are writing more for the individual and are striving to promote individual happiness and spiritual fulfillment, most authors also speak of the ways in which living according to the Bible not only helps the individual but also will help restore order to the chaotic state of society.

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<sup>71</sup> Moslener, *Virgin Nation*, 83.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, 84.

As conservative evangelicals turned into activists promoting the safety of the nation through traditional living in reaction to many of the ideas coming out of the women's movement, men's and women's ability to perform their God-given gender roles became a greater concern than ever before. In multiple purity books published since 2006, the authors explain that feminism has hardened women's *natural* gentleness. In *Purely Woman* the authors claim, "The hardness feminism instills in women's hearts has kept them from embracing the life-giving beauty God has created within them."<sup>74</sup> From passages like these, readers learn the conservative evangelical understanding of God's expectations for women and what is preventing women from attaining this apparently innate nature. Purity authors tell their female readers that women who are searching for more meaning, purpose, or contentment in their lives will find the solution in cultivating their truly feminine and God-given spirits rather than in looking to feminism. They believe that this approach will not only heal individual women, but it will also repair an entire culture damaged by an immoral feminist agenda. Both *SHE* and *Purely Woman* cite a passage from 1 Peter that addresses wives when discussing gentleness, which says, "The incorruptible beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit...is very precious in the sight of God."<sup>75</sup> As evangelicals who strongly believe in the principle of *sola scriptura*, St. James and Bjorklund do not believe that any modern argument can refute what Scripture claims is "precious in the sight of God," and according to purity authors, feminism promotes the exact opposite of what is precious in the sight of God.

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<sup>74</sup> Black, Lewis, and Wilson, *Purely Woman*, 20.

<sup>75</sup> St. James and Bjorklund, *SHE*, 71; Black, Lewis, and Wilson, 21.

## **Power and Submission**

One of the main ideas that conservative evangelicals promote that feminists find especially confusing is power through submission. Submission manifests itself in various ways in Christians' lives. There is submission to God, a central practice of evangelical Christianity that evangelicals believe both men and women must work tirelessly to achieve. The idea of overcoming one's own inherently sinful nature by submitting to God's will is a very complex and centuries old idea that deserves more explanation than is possible here, but what is important for the purity movement is that both men and women are in theory held to the same standard of submission to God. However, 1 Corinthians 11:3 says, "But I want you to understand that Christ is the head of every man, and the husband is the head of his wife, and God is the head of Christ." While both men and women must submit to God, according to this letter, a wife must also submit to her husband's will. In purity culture, daughters are additionally expected to submit to their fathers' will, the result being that women are always submitting to a man's will, whether it is that of their fathers or that of their husbands. For someone outside of this culture looking in, this practice usually appears to be uncompromisingly oppressive towards women. Marie Griffith was one of the first scholars to write on this seemingly contradictory idea of power through submission in a book on an evangelical women's organization called the Women's Aglow Fellowship. In a chapter titled "The Power of Submission," Griffith explains that submission is not something that these evangelical women passively or easily accept and embrace. Rather, the doctrine of submission is something that the women learn to use as a means of controlling their own lives and initiating personal healing. Griffith writes,

While many outsiders might assume that the conservative Christian women in Aglow are merely participating in their own victimization, internalizing patriarchal ideas about female submission that confirm and increase their sense of personal inferiority, the women themselves claim the doctrine of submission leads both to freedom and to transformation, as God rewards His obedient daughters by healing their sorrows and easing their pain. Thus interpreted, the doctrine of submission becomes a means of asserting power over bad situations, including circumstances over which one may otherwise have no control.<sup>76</sup>

Purity authors recognize that the idea of submission may seem unappealing to young women who have grown up with feminist ideals all around them, so they make sure to explain why it is empowering. In *Purely Woman*, the Wilson sisters discuss the importance of daughters submitting to their fathers. They state, “Submission is an expression of absolute power and strength, not of weakness. When we submit to our fathers’ authority, God uses that covering of protection in our lives in ways we may not understand at first. But in the hidden beauty of covering, we experience His strength and love through our fathers, who are there to guide us, encourage us, and model what life and love are all about.”<sup>77</sup> When girls submit to their fathers, they argue, God can work through their fathers to protect them.

What becomes apparent when reading purity literature for women is that a very clear pattern exists in which authors stress the empowerment that women experience when they embrace a life of purity and submission. Christine Gardner points out that

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<sup>76</sup> Marie Griffith, *God’s Daughters: Evangelical Women and the Power of Submission* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 179. Saba Mahmood also echoes this idea in a book about the Muslim women’s piety movement in Egypt. Mahmood argues that what outsiders may see as extreme passivity among the women in this movement can actually be a form of agency, but outsiders can only understand this form of agency using the discourse and structure of that culture. She also discusses the idea of women creating natural feelings that they would like to have, such as shyness for Muslim women, through action. She says, “...action does not issue forth from natural feelings but *creates* them.” This is similar young women’s approach in the purity movement towards becoming submissive. Saba Mahmood, *Politics of Piety: The Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 157.

<sup>77</sup> Black, Lewis, and Wilson, *Purely Woman*, 176-77.

purity activists actually borrow feminist rhetoric to appeal to young people and especially to young women. She argues, “American evangelicals appear to be borrowing a central argument of secular society: they are recasting an essentially feminist argument of ‘my body, my choice’ and persuading teenagers that they are choice-making individuals who can control their bodies and wait for sex.”<sup>78</sup> Therefore, while the purity movement claims to stand in direct opposition to feminist ideals, it simultaneously relies heavily on their rhetoric. St. James and Bjorklund list various ways in which the feminist agenda affects women of all ages today, but what they overlook is that their very argument of appealing to a woman’s sense of empowerment assumes that the feminist movement has already affected women in a way that causes them to embrace being autonomous choice-making individuals. Gardner says, “The call may be for young women to submit, but the campaign rhetoric also portrays young women as holding the power. The female power argument is an audience-centered argument that is persuasive to a generation of teens who live in a culture that assumes sexual freedom and the power to choose what is right for their own bodies.”<sup>79</sup> Purity authors promote female power and autonomy as a good thing rather than condemn it as a negative influence that confines their work, which highlights the fact that some aspects of the purity movement are a direct result of feminism even as the movement claims to exist in part because evangelicals need to take action against feminism.

## **Power and Modesty**

One area of purity culture where this idea of female empowerment becomes especially apparent is through arguments surrounding modesty. Every primary source I

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<sup>78</sup> Gardner, *Making Chastity Sexy*, 13-14.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, 87.

used that was written by women for women and/or girls stressed the importance of dressing modestly, but no one stresses this issue more than Dannah Gresh, who has written an entire pamphlet-like book entitled *Secret Keeper: The Delicate Power of Modesty*.<sup>80</sup> Even simply looking at the title informs the reader of the rhetorical strategies that Gresh uses. Not only does the title claim that modesty is powerful, but it also carefully categorizes the kind of power that it gives girls as “delicate.” Purity authors who write about female empowerment are usually careful to qualify the kind of power women have as delicate, soft or tender, ensuring that women are still feminine even as they step into a more masculine role of possessing power. In discussions regarding modesty, these authors assert that women are powerful when they dress modestly because they become responsible for protecting men’s minds from lustful and impure thoughts and because it makes them more desirable to men. Overall, modesty is a means for women to control men’s feelings and actions.

In *Secret Keeper*, Gresh argues that women and girls have an immense responsibility to protect boys’ and men’s minds through the way that they dress. She writes, “If a guy sees a girl walking around in tight clothes or a miniskirt or tiny shorts...well, she might as well hang a noose around the neck of his spiritual life. It’s not ‘just’ fashion but a constant source of spiritual failure for men.”<sup>81</sup> According to Gresh and other purity authors, to be male is to be lustful, and this fact requires no further explanation than that God intended men to be this way. She even writes, “*Your* body can really drive a guy crazy. And that’s what God intended.”<sup>82</sup> Because of this, girls and women must protect men’s apparently weak minds. In an interview that Gresh

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<sup>80</sup> Dannah Gresh, *Secret Keeper: The Delicate Power of Modesty* (Chicago: Moody Press, 2011).

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, 61-62.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, 29 (italics Gresh’s).

conducted with Joshua Harris, a Christian singer, Harris says, “Girls have a responsibility to their brothers in Christ to help guard their purity. They have a responsibility to the guy.”<sup>83</sup> Even though Gresh writes in *Secret Keeper* and in *And the Bride Wore White* that when a guy chooses to act on his lust and make sexual advances it is *his* fault, that message becomes muddled and confused when she says, “Altering the course of the full birth of lust once aroused is very difficult for a guy,” and it is women, not men, who are apparently responsible for planting those thoughts.<sup>84</sup> When girls dress immodestly, Gresh argues, boys’ morals become “suddenly and terribly weakened.”<sup>85</sup> Based on Gresh’s reasoning, it seems that even though she claims men are responsible for not acting on a thought, girls are ultimately responsible for weakening men’s self-control.

Gresh’s arguments that boys have a very difficult time resisting lustful thoughts and that girls have the ability to keep boys from thinking lustful thoughts in the first place gives girls a great deal of power. However, even as Gresh happily tells her readers that being modest is powerful, girls are ultimately dressing modestly so that boys and men will view them as pure girls worth pursuing and protecting, thus giving the power back to men. Gresh writes, “Modesty is a great paradox. Though an immodest woman creates insatiable curiosity in a guy, it is the modest girl whose heart he most desires.”<sup>86</sup> Gresh acknowledges that the modesty issue is paradoxical, but only for reasons having to do with what makes a man really desire a woman. I would argue, on the other hand, that it is paradoxical because women are told it empowers them

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<sup>83</sup> Gresh, *And the Bride Wore White*, 87.

<sup>84</sup> Gresh, *Secret Keeper*, 54.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, 55.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, 77.

when it does not actually seem to do so. Modesty, it seems, is more about being desirable to men rather than about being empowered. Empowerment is not the end goal; being pursued by a good Christian man is. The ability to determine who and what is valuable, the real source of power, resides with men, not women.

## **Conclusion**

Whether it is through modesty, submission or embracing a more tender nature, purity authors are constantly telling their female readers that actions such as these will make them feel more empowered. Although female empowerment and happiness are goals that purity authors promote for their female readers and are goals shared by purity authors and feminists, these two groups' understanding of what will make women feel powerful are completely different. Despite shared goals, the purity movement stands in direct opposition to the feminist movement, so much so that purity authors believe that Satan is behind feminism. Just like Satan tempted Eve in the garden with the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil, Satan is still tempting women with the wrong kind of power.

## **Chapter 3: The Fall**

As conservative evangelicals in the United States shifted their opinions on innate and ideal femininity and the value of female empowerment, evangelicals today have turned to the story of the fall of Adam and Eve to both justify and make sense of their views. Historically, Christians have used the story of the fall as one from which to understand the nature of the relationship between God and humans, but it has also served as a key part of understanding the differences between men and women. From Saint Augustine writing in the fourth and fifth centuries to conservative evangelical authors today, the story of the fall of Adam and Eve has helped to inform Christians on what is innate to each sex, what different vices and virtues are common to each, and how each should ideally act. The purity movement may seem to focus primarily on virginity, but essential to getting young women and men to remain virgins until marriage is getting them to embrace what evangelicals today believe are the perfect ideals of masculinity and femininity. In order to understand what these ideals look like, one must understand how people in the purity movement today understand the fall of Adam and Eve, for in Adam and Eve before the fall evangelicals find the ideal man and woman to emulate. When purity authors instruct their readers to act in certain ways, they believe they are recapturing the essence of authentic masculinity and femininity that God originally created in Adam and Eve.

According to evangelical thought, the fall of Adam and Eve is a real event that took place in the Garden of Eden. God created Adam and Eve in God's own image for

the purpose of ruling over earth and enjoying God's fellowship.<sup>87</sup> The only rule God gave them was to not eat from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil, warning Adam and Eve that they would die if they did. Satan, disguised as a serpent, then tempted Eve into eating the fruit from the tree, telling her in Genesis 3:4-5, "You will not die; for God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil." Eve then ate the fruit, disobeying God and bringing judgment down upon her, Adam, and all their progeny. Historically, Christians have often pointed to Eve's actions in the garden as proof that women are foolish and temptresses. God then punishes Adam and Eve and expels them from the garden, telling them that all men will toil and suffer to provide food and all women will have great pain during childbirth. As a result of sin, both the sin people inherit from Adam and Eve and the sins they themselves commit, people are separated from God and stand in need of salvation through Christ.<sup>88</sup>

Although Genesis does not actually address the ideas of masculinity and femininity, evangelicals nonetheless use the story of the fall to help them understand more about the nature of men and women. For purity authors in general, true masculinity and femininity means what God created men and women as before the fall. While few purity books exist for men, there is a plethora of books authored by evangelicals aimed at men of all ages instructing them on how to be more masculine. In some ways, one can consider these books as counterparts to purity books for women because both focus on understanding and recapturing the essence of masculinity or femininity. Even though there are many Christian books for women that specifically

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<sup>87</sup> Noll, *American Evangelical Christianity*, 62.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*

focus on womanhood and femininity, most purity books spend a great deal of time on instructing women to cultivate a more feminine character. Whatever the authors writing these books instruct men and women to do, whether it is for women to stay at home and care for the children or for men to have strong spiritual leadership and authority over the family, evangelicals believe that these actions reflect as closely as possible the perfection that God originally created before Adam and Eve first sinned. Evangelicals believe that Satan uses popular culture, what they refer to as simply “our culture” or “today’s culture”, as a means of spreading lies and temptation, and they believe that one of Satan’s roles is to confuse proper gender roles. They believe that Satan, through the feminist agenda, is trying to keep evangelical men and women from embodying authentic forms of masculinity and femininity. Amid the lies and chaos they believe Satan is spreading, evangelicals turn to their main source of authority, the Bible, and specifically to Adam and Eve before the fall, to understand both what went wrong with masculinity and femininity and what exactly the original ideals were. For evangelicals and those in the purity movement today, therefore, understanding the ideal forms of masculinity and femininity is to understand what God originally intended men and women to be like before Adam and Eve perverted God’s perfect plan.

### **The Masculinity Crisis**

Many purity books address feminism and the threat it poses to femininity, but many Christian authors have also written books for men that perceive a great threat to masculinity. In the book *Wild at Heart: Discovering the Secret of a Man’s Soul*, one of the best-selling Christian books for men, evangelical author John Eldredge sets out to help Christian men restore themselves to the way God originally made them. Eldredge

wrote his book in 2001 at a time when many Christian men felt threatened by evolving conceptions of gender and changing family relations such as “increasing divorce rates, out-of-wedlock births, single-parent families, and abortions.”<sup>89</sup> In response to this, many Christian men felt a need to reclaim their more traditional roles as leaders of their families. Eldredge’s book shows him to be one of these men, and he expresses ideas similar to those of the Christian men’s organization “Promise Keepers,” which holds ideas reminiscent of muscular Christianity and promotes complimentary gender roles reminiscent of the Victorian era. Both Eldredge and the Promise Keepers hold an essentialist view of gender, “which asserts that differences between men and women are rooted in innate psychic and physical qualities resulting from necessary or essential connections between sex and gender.”<sup>90</sup> Based on Eldredge’s claims in *Wild at Heart*, it seems he believes that modern cultural influences have hindered both men and women from fully understanding and embracing the gender role inherently tied to their sex. He points to what he believes has gone wrong with masculinity in the last thirty years and states that “society at large” has told men to be sensitive, safe, and manageable, characteristics he concludes are feminine.<sup>91</sup> He claims that the church, too, is at fault for the current crisis in masculinity because it holds “Really Nice Guys” who are efficient and punctual in the business world and dutiful in the home as role models for men.<sup>92</sup> Because these roles, according to Eldredge, leave men increasingly “bored” and effeminate, “the *heart* of a man is driven into the high country, into remote

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<sup>89</sup> Allen, *Rise Up, O Men of God*, 7.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.

<sup>91</sup> Eldredge, *Wild at Heart*, 7.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*

places, like a wounded animal looking for cover.”<sup>93</sup> Eldredge sees a crisis among men everywhere who seem incapable of living from their hearts as God wants them to, and he is determined to help them understand God’s purpose for them.

### **Masculinity in *Wild at Heart***

To understand the ideal of masculinity, Eldredge looks not only to Adam before he sinned but to young boys as well, whom he believes demonstrate innate desires rather than cultural or social influences. He asks, “Why does God create Adam? What is a man for?”<sup>94</sup> He answers by telling his readers that “Desire reveals design,” meaning that if men just pay attention to what they yearn for deep down, they will know their purpose.<sup>95</sup> Eldredge assumes that deep down, all men desire to “explore, build, conquer,” to go on adventures, and to rescue beautiful women.<sup>96</sup> He looks to young boys as proof, explaining that no boy needs to be told to go have adventures because they naturally yearn for them, and at a young age boys are already rehearsing their roles as brave knights saving princesses. Eldredge says, “You don’t have to tell a boy to do those things for the simple reason that it *is his purpose*.”<sup>97</sup> For Eldredge, not only are these yearnings for exploration and adventure natural to men of all ages, but they also serve to show men their God-given purpose.<sup>98</sup>

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<sup>93</sup> Ibid., 8.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid., 50.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid., 51.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid. (italic’s Eldredge’s).

<sup>98</sup> At the beginning of the twentieth century, men organized the “Men and Religion Forward Movement,” which also reacted in large part to a perceived feminization of society. However, the ideal masculinity they promoted was very different than the ideal masculinity promoted at the end of the twentieth century by people like Eldredge. Scholar L. Dean Allen points out in his book *Rise Up, O Men of God* that at the beginning of the twentieth century, the Men and Religion Forward Movement “believed men were emotionally restrained, active rather than reflective, and intent on developing businesslike efficiency in

## Adam's Sin

Eldredge finds further proof of what is natural for men in his understanding of what Adam was like before he and Eve sinned and in the details of how Adam acted in the fall. Interestingly, he focuses on what God neglected to tell Adam. Eldredge observes that God instructed Adam not to eat from the tree of knowledge of good and evil, but despite knowing that the snake would tempt Eve, God did not warn Adam of what was inevitably to come. Eldredge's explanation for why God did not tell Adam what Eve would do is simple: "Because God *believes* in Adam. This is what he's designed to do—to come through in a pinch. Adam doesn't need play-by-play instructions because this is what Adam is created *for*. It's already there, everything he needs, in his design, in his heart."<sup>99</sup> The very fact that God does not tell Adam what he needs to do when the serpent tempts Eve is proof, according to Eldredge, that God designed Adam to be completely capable of intervening. In fact, Eldredge believes that Adam was not only capable of intervening but he had to actually deny his very nature in order to stay silent as he watched Eve disobey the one rule God gave them. Both Eldredge and Christian author Larry Crabb, who wrote an entire book about the consequences of Adam's silence in the garden titled *The Silence of Adam*, reference a passage from 1 Timothy to aid in their interpretation of the fall that says, "and Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor." Because

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all their activities." At the end of the twentieth century, by contrast, Christian men's organizations viewed men as "emotionally expressive, competitive, and sexual." Allen, *Rise Up, O Men of God*, 14.  
<sup>99</sup> Eldredge, *Wild at Heart*, 52 (italics Eldredge's).

Scripture explicitly says that Adam was not deceived, Crabb concludes that Adam had to have been with Eve, passively watching as he watched her disobey God.<sup>100</sup>

The result of this sin, according to Eldredge and Crabb, was devastating. Of course, Adam and Eve's disobedience is the cause of humanity's separation from God and the reason why men must suffer as they toil and women must suffer through childbirth, but in addition to this, men continue to fail to be as God wants them to be because of Adam's silence. These authors argue that like Adam, every man has a tendency to remain silent when he should speak: "Every man repeats the sin of Adam, every day. We won't risk, we won't fight, and we won't rescue Eve."<sup>101</sup> Retreating from the difficulties of life rather than dealing with them as Adam should have, Eldredge and Crabb believe, men become angry with life's difficulties that they are not able to handle, and because of their frustration, they turn away from God. Crabb says, "From then on, everything goes wrong. Committed only to himself, he scrambles to make his own life work. The result is what we see every day: sexual passions out of control, uninvolved husbands and fathers, angry men who love to be in the driver's seat. And it all began when Adam refused to speak."<sup>102</sup> Many evangelicals today, including those involved in the purity movement, believe that popular culture threatens men's ability to be truly masculine in a biblical way, but they also believe that there are deeply rooted theological reasons why men are especially weak when it comes to sexual passion and self-discipline.

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<sup>100</sup> Larry Crabb, *God Calls Men to Move beyond the Silence of Adam: Becoming Men of Courage in a World of Chaos* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995), 11, 89-93.

<sup>101</sup> Eldredge, *Wild at Heart*, 53.

<sup>102</sup> Crabb, *Silence of Adam*, 12.

## Femininity and Eve

While Eldredge focuses on Adam's sin in the garden more than many authors before him, he is sure to explain its consequences for all women. According to Eldredge, God made Eve primarily to be Adam's companion. Many purity books point out that God made Eve for Adam, stressing that men and women need companionship from the opposite sex. Eldredge does not dwell on what Eve was like before she sinned, but in the book *SHE: Safe, Healthy, Empowered* Rebecca St. James and Lynda Hunter Bjorklund ask, "So what qualities did the first woman possess that God can help you and me regain? Before Eve's first sin, SHE was **S**afe, **H**ealthy, and **E**mpowered. We can be too."<sup>103</sup> Their book covers a wide range of topics for women, its main goal being to promote the safety, health and empowerment of women that they believe "today's culture" deeply threatens. Just like Eldredge claims that masculinity is under threat from outside sources, St. James and Bjorklund claim that femininity is in a similar crisis. While many evangelicals believe that men are becoming increasingly feminine, they also believe that women are becoming increasingly masculine by embracing the independence and toughness that the feminist movement encourages.<sup>104</sup> People in the purity movement believe that women have lost the art of being a woman by rejecting the softer and gentler features that, according to them, are innate to women because of the way God created them.

Just as some authors argue that men's inability to master true masculinity today traces back to Adam's first sin, some also believe that women's current struggle with femininity is rooted in Eve's first sin. According to Eldredge, once the serpent

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<sup>103</sup> St. James and Bjorklund, *SHE*, 11.

<sup>104</sup> Black, Lewis, and Wilson, *Purely Woman*, 20.

deceived Eve, her ability to master true femininity was lost. Whereas before her sin Eve was vulnerable, generous, and secure in her beauty, Eldredge argues, now she is controlling and grasping, and uses her beauty to be manipulative.<sup>105</sup> Banished from the garden and no longer reliably safe, healthy, or empowered, Eve does not know whether to protect herself, wrongly projecting herself into the man's role, or to rely too heavily on the man's protection. Eldredge says, "Fallen Eve either becomes rigid or clingy. Put simply, Eve is no longer simply *inviting*. She is either hiding in busyness or demanding that Adam come through for her; usually, an odd combination of both."<sup>106</sup> Women, who all represent "fallen Eve" according to Eldredge, are just as lost as men and are perverting their own nature because of Eve's sin.

### **Eve and Sexual Temptation**

When purity authors mention Eve, they use her as an example of what happens when women foolishly fall for temptation. Although they do not dwell on her long, it is clear that they see Eve after the fall as the embodiment of the destructive power of women. The consequences of her actions in the garden are analogous to the consequences of women's refusal to be submissive. Dannah Gresh is one purity author who uses Eve's story as a precautionary tale for those who act recklessly and foolishly in the face of temptation, especially sexual temptation. She writes, "Eve's story sounds so much like the sexually enlightened world in which you and I live."<sup>107</sup> Gresh explains that just as Satan tempted Eve with lies in the garden, Satan today tempts women with the lie that they can make appropriate sexual decisions. Gresh writes, "He caused Eve

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<sup>105</sup> Eldredge, *Wild at Heart*, 53.

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*, 54 (italics Eldredge's).

<sup>107</sup> Gresh, *And the Bride Wore White*, 29.

to believe that she had the intellect to draw her own morality—or to determine what was right for her...God said no, and Eve should have too.”<sup>108</sup> Gresh believes that the messages women hear today about the permissibility of sex before marriage and the importance of safe sex are simply temptations that God very clearly disallows. Gresh argues that women today believe they have the wisdom to make appropriate sexual decisions in the face of these temptations; yet, while she presents purity as a choice, Gresh also suggests that women do not have the power or right to draw on their intellect and morality when it comes to making informed sexual decisions. Gresh argues that so long as women are overly confident as Eve was—which is also a way of saying they are not truly feminine—they will not achieve purity.

## Conclusion

St. James and Bjorklund write, “God’s best—a pure and full life—was given as a gift in the beginning but became a prize to be sought after like mad by all the women who have followed.”<sup>109</sup> John Eldredge and Larry Crabb would say the same about men. It is clear that even among purity authors who do not explicitly say it, there is a strong belief that women and men struggle with embodying the masculine and feminine aspects of themselves that they understand God to have designed within them. Crabb writes, “The Genesis creation story never affirms the violence and demanding sexual appetite of men. Instead the story gives a rich portrait of what man was in his perfect state and what man could be if he lived in the image of God.”<sup>110</sup> Because this issue of authentic femininity comes up so much in purity books for women, it is also clear that

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<sup>108</sup> Ibid.

<sup>109</sup> St. James and Bjorklund, *SHE*, 10.

<sup>110</sup> Crabb, *Silence of Adam*, 75.

authors believe mastering how to be feminine is an essential ingredient for remaining pure. What women (and men) must first do, however, is understand the ways in which the purity movement claims popular culture is deceiving men and women and tempting them to be something they are not meant to be, something that conservative evangelicals believe is extremely detrimental to their own happiness and even to society's overall safety. What turns out to be one of the main causes of women's confusion and sin, and even men's confusion as well, is the feminist movement.

## Chapter 4: The Fairy Tale Narrative

In the opening of *Wait for Me: Rediscovering the Joy of Purity in Romance*, Rebecca St. James tells two versions of the same fairy tale, one from the perspective of a princess and one from the perspective of a prince. In the princess's version, the princess walks fearful, confused and alone through a cold and ominous forest. When she hears a big crash, she turns around terrified looking for a place to hide, only to find a brave and valiant prince who has come to save her. St. James writes, "The man smiles at you, a smile that reaches his eyes, and you know immediately that you can trust him."<sup>111</sup> He scoops her into the safety of his arms, and they ride off into the sunset. The princess knows that "this might just be the 'happily ever after' of which [she has] always dreamed."<sup>112</sup> In the version told from the perspective of the prince, the story begins with a call from the king to save his daughter whom the "Dark Lord" has abducted. The king promises that whoever saves her will have her hand in marriage. The "champion warrior" then traverses dangers through swamps, forests and steep seaside cliffs, defeating many evil creatures along the way.<sup>113</sup> The knight meets challenge after challenge and finally comes face to face in a final match against the fire-breathing dragon, a beast that he triumphs over against all odds. At last, he reaches the princess and sweeps her into his arms. She gazes at him "with radiant eyes of adoration," and the two rappel down a cliff, knowing in their hearts that they have finally found "everlasting love."<sup>114</sup>

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<sup>111</sup> Rebecca St. James, *Wait for Me: Rediscovering the Joy of Purity in Romance* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2002), 1.

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

The purity movement has made significant use of the fairy tale narrative that follows this same arc, making sure girls hear it from the time they can read up until the age when they get married, thereby normalizing and enforcing certain understandings of what young single women should value and how they should conduct themselves. Based on the passage above from St. James' book, the narrative clearly involves both females and males, and while the purity movement certainly calls for young men to play the part of prince, there is seemingly more responsibility put on single women to play the part of princess correctly. This is in large part because, as many books suggest or flat out say, people within the purity movement believe that women and girls can inspire men and boys to play the part of the prince in a way that no man or boy could ever inspire women and girls to play the princess. If a woman then fails to play the part of the princess in a way that makes a man want to play the prince, there will be no happily ever after, and the failure rests with the woman. The purity movement therefore presents young single women and girls as having a great deal of power over men for something with significant consequences, something reminiscent of the power Eve had over Adam. At a time when conservative evangelical Christians believe Satan is spreading lies through the feminist movement that threaten the stability of one of society's most foundational building blocks—the nuclear family—the purity movement uses the fairy tale narrative as a roadmap for redemption. Just as with the fall, the success or failure of the story rests with women's ability to be submissive to men.

After St. James opens her book with her two versions of a fairy tale, which she refers to as "The Dream," she asserts, "God has placed 'The Dream' inside each one of

us.”<sup>115</sup> She claims that the fairy tale is more than just a dream; it is a God-given desire that God has placed inside every person, the only exception being those whom God has called to remain single. This is demonstrative of a widely held belief among people in purity culture regarding the fairy tale. A common presumption among the purity books I used for this research is that the classic fairy tale involving a pure and vulnerable princess and a brave prince is something both universally known and universally appealing. Most significantly, it is universal because God placed the desire to be a princess in every female and the desire to be a brave knight in every male. In *Wild at Heart*, John Eldredge writes, “From ancient fables to the latest blockbuster, the theme of a strong man coming to rescue a beautiful woman is universal to human nature. It is written in our hearts, one of the core desires of every man and every woman.”<sup>116</sup> The fairy tale narrative is therefore not simply a popular story for children and Hollywood alike, but, rather, is an inherent part of being human, something God wove into every individual’s DNA, just like a gene determining hair color.

It is worth noting that the fact that so many purity authors view the fairy tale narrative as something universal to human nature signifies some of the deeper racial and class assumptions of the purity movement. When writing about princesses and fairy tales, despite claiming the universality of these concepts and desires, certain claims that authors make point to underlying assumptions that they have a predominantly white, middle to upper class audience. One book opens with a story about a princess and her beautiful blonde flowing hair.<sup>117</sup> In *Purely Woman*, the authors

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<sup>115</sup> Ibid., 5.

<sup>116</sup> Eldredge, *Wild at Heart*, 183.

<sup>117</sup> Sarah Mally, *Before You Meet Prince Charming* (Cedar Rapids: Tomorrow’s Forefathers, Inc., 2006), 15.

write about how their parents have gotten them all Venetian crystal tiaras, beautiful dresses, and charm bracelets for certain purity rituals that make them feel like princesses. In *And the Bride Wore White*, Dannah Gresh talks about her own fairytale wedding complete with a big ball gown wedding dress and a tiara. Indeed, scholar Sara Moslener points out that the purity movement may not have existed at all if it were not for rising pregnancy rates among white, unmarried teenage girls in the 1980s.<sup>118</sup> Certain claims that the purity movement makes about innate desires, therefore, are usually from the perspective of white, middle class individuals.

## **The Fairy Tale and Gender**

As previously argued, evangelicals today assert certain understandings of innate femininity and masculinity that are the product of evolving interpretations of the fall and are also a response to social context. Today, they generally believe that innate, God-given femininity includes being submissive, domestic, and pious while true masculinity includes being a leader, being brave, and having a need for adventure. Because the typical characteristics of the princess and the prince in fairy tales reflect these values, it makes sense that the purity movement would make use of the narrative to help girls and boys recognize how they should really be acting. The fairy tale narrative therefore becomes a contemporary tool that explains and even enhances evangelicals' understanding of biblical gender roles. Because evangelicals believe that correctly performing gender roles is a form of proof that one is submissive to God and, as Moslener argues, is key to the security of the nation, evangelicals have expertly

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<sup>118</sup> Moslener, *Virgin Nation*, 116.

taken advantage of the popularity and accessibility of the fairy tale and use it to promote their current understanding of godly femininity and masculinity.<sup>119</sup>

While the typical princess character includes characteristics that people in the purity movement uncompromisingly value for females, such as purity and submission, the princess in popular fairy tales is quite passive, a feature that the purity movement complicates in its own fairy tale stories and in its instruction to single women.<sup>120</sup> In St. James' fairy tale, the princess has almost no agency and is passive in multiple respects: she does nothing other than walk fearfully through a dangerous forest before the prince finds her, and she exercises no choice over choosing a husband. Not all people within the purity movement are in total agreement on the issue of a woman's role in choosing her own husband, but the Wilson sisters instruct women in similar passivity with respect to choosing a husband. In a chapter dedicated to the period during which a woman waits for God to bring her a husband, one of the sisters writes, "[God] *awakens* our future husbands for us and will bring them into our lives at the perfect time. We don't need to go searching for them; that's God's job. Our part in all of this is to earnestly seek Him and rest in His plans for us."<sup>121</sup> Just like in fairy tales, women are not allowed to actively seek out their husbands. So long as a woman is living life as she is supposed to, she will need neither to exercise choice over who she marries nor actively seek him out because God will do all of this for her. Therefore, when it comes to choosing who they will spend the rest of their lives with, women are passive. Not only does God bring husbands into the lives of their future wives lives at the right time,

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<sup>119</sup> Ibid., 1-15.

<sup>120</sup> The purity movement refers to princesses and princes in general and sometimes points to popular princess stories like *Beauty and the Beast*, but they also write their own fairy tales specifically about purity.

<sup>121</sup> Black, Lewis, and Wilson, *Purely Woman*, 216 (italics Wilson's).

but according to the Wilson sisters' own marriage proposal stories, a woman's father has more agency over his daughter's marriage than she does.

### **Agency and Submission in the Fairy Tale Narrative**

The Wilson sisters are extreme in their views regarding the role a woman's father should play in her decision making, and other fairy tale stories written by authors in the purity movement challenge this idea of total passivity when it comes to choosing a husband. In a children's book titled *The Princess and the Kiss: A Story of God's Gift of Purity*, a book that many scholars writing on the purity movement cite in discussions regarding the fairy tale narrative, author Jennie Bishop tells the story of a young princess who must decide what to do with God's gift of a first kiss that she received on the day she was born.<sup>122</sup> Throughout the book, suitors appear, but the princess turns them all away until finally a man presents her with his own first kiss. The two get married, and they live happily ever after. Gardner points out that in this fairy tale, "the princess possesses agency, but it is a passive agency in that she must wait for the man of purity to find her."<sup>123</sup> The princess may use her judgment to choose a husband, but she does not actively pursue finding one. As Gardner also points out, there is only one correct choice for the princess, despite many options.

Fairy tales also typically present the princess as being passive and inactive before the prince even comes into her life. In St. James' fairy tale told from the perspective of the princess, the story begins with her alone and scared in a dangerous forest, but the prince immediately comes into the story. The prince saves her simply

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<sup>122</sup> Gardner, *Making Chastity Sexy*, 14-15; DeRogatis, *Saving Sex*, 67, 68-69, 71-72.

<sup>123</sup> Gardner, *Making Chastity Sexy*, 68.

because she is a princess, alone, and vulnerable, so she does nothing to actively win the heart of her suitor. The prince's version, on the other hand, is more than twice as long due to all the challenges he faces before he ever meets the princess. This is misrepresentative of the effort required of men and women before marriage because girls in the purity movement have to work extremely hard to become the princess lost in the woods worth fighting for, whereas guys are only expected to fend off their lustful nature as they wait for a princess to inspire them to act like a prince. In real life, men end up being the ones waiting for women to inspire them by being sufficiently princess-like. This makes the idea of women passively waiting far more complex, and presents somewhat of a paradox of needing to be active in order to appear passive. The very fact that purity books written for single women focus on how to conduct oneself before marriage, and the sheer number of these books that exist, are proof that people in the purity movement believe that being the ideal "princess" before marriage requires effort and discipline, not passiveness and inaction. This complicates the idea that Eve was not passive enough because it becomes clear that women cannot rectify Eve's mistakes and therefore their innate flaws by being more passive. In the purity movement, there is a key difference between being passive and being submissive. To be passive is to submit to one's own flawed nature. To be submissive in the ideal way is to be disciplined enough to submit to God and men.

In the same chapter of *Purely Woman* in which the Wilson sisters write to their readers that God will bring them their husbands and that they should not go searching for them, one of the sisters also claims, "Waiting isn't passive but active. It involves making choices that draw us closer to God as we wait for Him to reveal the answers to

our questions and the new seasons of our lives.”<sup>124</sup> She goes on to say that unmarried women must be active in guarding their bodies, thoughts, and hearts. All of these actions, however, are negative in nature: women need to be defensive rather than proactive when it comes to their bodies, thoughts and hearts. By protecting themselves in this way, women exhibit agency over themselves but only to the extent that they ensure that they remain women whom God feels are worth rewarding. When it comes to making decisions regarding their lives, the authors of *Purely Woman* imply that God and the men in women’s lives will make good decisions for them if they do a good enough job of becoming women whom men and God care about. The only active part they play in major decisions regarding their lives is controlling who they are so that men will treat them well. This adds to the point that even though women may end up being passive when it comes to choosing their husbands, they are intentional and disciplined in becoming the kind of women that God would reward with a husband, showing that becoming the princess worth fighting for requires action, not passivity.

### **Women in Action: Earning their Value**

In *And the Bride Wore White: Seven Secrets to Sexual Purity*, Gresh also stresses the importance of young women acting in a way that will make men want to respect and care for them. Gresh gives the girls reading her book the following scenario: they are sitting with her and she is pampering them with a hand massage, serving them tea in “dainty, valuable teacups,” feeding them Godiva biscuits on a silk and lace-covered table, and playing relaxing music.<sup>125</sup> She then asks them to compare

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<sup>124</sup> Black, Lewis and Wilson, *Purely Woman*, 217.

<sup>125</sup> Gresh, *And the Bride Wore White*, 75.

this experience to one in which she handed them tea at a coffee shop in a ceramic mug or, even worse, in a Styrofoam cup. Her point is: presentation matters. She instructs her readers to compare their self-presentation to different kinds of cups: "...are you a 'trashable' Styrofoam cup, an everyday ceramic mug that is easily replaceable, or a valuable, priceless teacup? It's all in the presentation."<sup>126</sup> She tells girls to think about things such as the way they dress, what they watch on TV, where they go on dates, and how to talk with God about boys. The message a girl gets is: if she is not presenting herself just as people in the purity movement expect her to, she is like a "trashable" Styrofoam cup or a ceramic mug, and "if the mug broke or we never got to go there again, no big deal. The mug wasn't treasured and valued in the highest sense."<sup>127</sup> Gresh tells her reader, "You are a princess. Your behavior and the choices you make must be governed by that value if you are aiming for the sunset ending in your love story. You must present yourself as you would priceless china."<sup>128</sup> Similar to the message in *Purely Woman*, girls are left thinking that if they do not manage to act perfectly like a pure princess in a fairy tale, they will not get a happily-ever-after.

Bob Gresh gives his all male-teenage audience similar advice but a very different underlying message in *Who Moved the Goalpost?: 7 Winning Strategies in the Sexual Integrity Gameplan*. Rather than giving his readers secrets to protecting their sexual purity like Dannah Gresh does for the girls reading her book, he gives them strategies on fending off their lust, working from the assumption that all boys struggle with lust. The goalpost in the title represent lust, the metaphor being that just like the goalpost was moved in the NFL from the goal line to the end of the zone so that

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<sup>126</sup> Ibid., 76.

<sup>127</sup> Ibid., 75.

<sup>128</sup> Ibid., 79.

players stopped running into it, boys can remove lust and temptation from their lives and stop bulldozing into them. In this book, Bob Gresh gives the boys a list of actions to evaluate that resembles the list given to the girls in *And the Bride Wore White*. Just like the girls, the boys are to evaluate whether they are watching the right movies, whether they are dressing well, and where they go on dates with girls. However, the list for girls in *And the Bride Wore White* is longer and asks girls to consider the length of time it takes for them to give guys their hearts, the way they treat their friends when a dating opportunity comes up, and the way they talk to God about boys.<sup>129</sup> In *And the Bride Wore White*, the girls' answers determine their worth in the eyes of others. According to Dannah Gresh, whether or not they watch the right movies or talk about boys in the right way makes them either trashable or valuable. In *Who Moved the Goalpost*, on the other hand, Bob Gresh makes no claim that the answers to these questions affect teen boys' value as a person. He offers a metaphor of an overgrown yard filled with weeds, and rather than ending up a "trashable Styrofoam cup," Gresh tells his readers that if they are struggling with the list, they "need to establish some new guidelines" and "get some help to make some changes."<sup>130</sup> Whereas boys need only try to cope with their lust, girls must worry about how every single one of their actions affects their value in the eyes of boys.

## **Inspiring the Prince**

Not only is acting as a princess important for girls to get their fairy tale ending, but purity authors also claim that it has the power to call men higher and make them better, more moral people. This idea is reminiscent of ideals held by early twentieth

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<sup>129</sup> Gresh, *And the Bride Wore White*, 75.

<sup>130</sup> Bob and Dannah Gresh, *Who Moved the Goalpost*, 98.

century purity reformers who sought to expand the female standard of sexual purity to men as well. Purity activists today, however, have a different take on how to get men to act morally. Rather than simply hold men to a higher standard like the early purity reformers did, people in the purity movement today believe that it is a woman's God-given responsibility to inspire men to be better people. They view this as a uniquely feminine power, and, for all the discussion in evangelical circles of the leadership and authority men should have over women, no book that I read claims that men have the power to make women more moral people. This power comes up in Dannah Gresh's discussions on modesty and the idea that women must dress modestly so as to protect men's minds from impure thoughts, thereby helping them be better Christian men. Modesty is one strategy of making men act better, but the Wilson sisters talk about the more general power of respecting men. Their main argument in the chapter dedicated to respect is that women have great power in being able to bring out the best in men by respecting them. Jordyn, who wrote this chapter, gives examples of just how powerful and transformative this respect can be and cites *Beauty and the Beast*. She explains that in the story, the prince is cursed because he was selfish and unkind,

But when Belle showed up at his doorstep, her goodness overcame his cruelty and inspired him to greatness. The honor, goodness, and dignity she brought back into the castle transformed him into a prince once again. Do we bring out the prince or the fool in our men? The way we treat them has the power to unleash greatness or mediocrity to make them kingly or common. This is the power of respect.<sup>131</sup>

The only way to bring out the prince in men is to act as a Disney princess might act and give them total respect. Jordyn argues that this is not just a God-given duty that women

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<sup>131</sup> Black, Lewis, and Wilson, *Purely Woman*, 80.

have but it is their privilege, and women must respond to men's strengths rather than belittle or compete with them.

In *SHE*, St. James and Bjorklund give the example of Deborah from Judges 4-5 as someone who correctly balanced working alongside men with exhibiting the correct amount of respect and submission in a way that allowed men to be better people. Deborah worked as a judge at a time when the king of Canaan ruled over and oppressed the Israelites. Rather than “stand up for herself as an independent female” only to become “tough and judgmental,” Deborah did not compete with the men she worked with, and because she earned so much respect from the Israelites, St. James and Bjorklund assume that she “must have understood the delicate balance between leading and submitting.”<sup>132</sup> St. James also offers a personal scenario, describing a time when she decided that she had better judgment than a man she was working on a missionary house project with. She thought it would be better to move a window from a busy place to somewhere more out of the way where it would not get broken. When she asked the man in charge, he said that was not necessary, but she moved it anyway. Even though nothing negative came of her actions, she ended up feeling that “I should've recognized that it was his window and his home, and I should have respected his authority to have the last word—even when I thought my way was best.”<sup>133</sup> She and Bjorklund then write, “Submission means that we voluntarily acknowledge the leadership responsibilities of others...we step aside and allow God to work through the gifts He's given them. It's their job not to exploit that trust or submission.”<sup>134</sup> They believe that

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<sup>132</sup> St. James and Bjorklund, *SHE*, 71, 74.

<sup>133</sup> *Ibid.*, 75.

<sup>134</sup> *Ibid.*

when women treat men with the right level of trust and respect, God can then work through men, and the men are better people because of how women treat them.

## **Conclusion**

According to purity books written by women and for women, women have a lot of power over men, and even though the purity movement expects women to be submissive, women in the purity movement are anything but passive. They must work tirelessly to remain pure and to become the kind of women for whom men will want to fight and with whom men will want to be.<sup>135</sup> It is true that both the princesses in most fairy tales and the young single women in the purity movement appear to be passive, but whether the men pursuing them realize it or not, the “princesses” men “fight” for are far more disciplined and in control of their actions than men realize. Indeed, women in the purity movement have controlled their actions in a way that inspired these men to act. Because women apparently have so much power to inspire men, women have power over the entire outcome of the story. The fairy tale is the modern guide to redemption, but if women cannot play the princess, men are not called to play the prince, and God redeems neither man nor woman. Just like the situation that Adam and Eve found themselves in Eden, the ending is dependent on Eve’s actions. If she can resist the hardness and independence that today’s feminism-saturated culture encourages and play the submissive, respectful, and pure princess, both she and her prince will have their happily ever after. If she cannot be the princess, all of humanity is doomed.

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<sup>135</sup> Even when they are married, Griffith argues in *God’s Daughters* that submission in marriage requires conscious effort and discipline. According to her book, godly submission is anything but passive.

## Conclusion

Since the purity movement caught national attention in 1993 when thousands of teens from True Love Waits flooded the national mall, scholars have looked on as evangelicals try to transform society through the purity of young people's bodies. There is no hard and fast answer for why the purity movement exploded with such popularity in the 1990s, but we do know from testimonies of those involved with the purity movement that they saw sin all around them in the way that most Americans were casually treating sex. They wanted to stand up to the idea that everyone was having sex before marriage and that teens had no choice but to follow along with the dominant flow of culture.<sup>136</sup> Perhaps, as Moslener believes, the purity movement was more than just a reaction to the values coming out of the 1960s, but was instead a continuation of an evangelical tradition in the United States of trying to transform society through pure bodies. The question that has persisted in my mind through this research, however, is: *why* are evangelicals so focused on pure bodies, and on female bodies especially, and why, after centuries of insisting that women should strive to be submissive, are conservative evangelicals now so intent on telling women that they should also feel empowered? Part of the answer lies in the fact that the purity movement came after the feminist movement, and the idea that although it claims to stand directly opposite to the feminist movement, general ideas of gender equality are so widespread that even conservative evangelicals recognize that they must appeal to young women's sense of autonomy and equality to men. However, in addition to this

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<sup>136</sup> "Testimony Videos," True Love Waits by LifeWay Christian Resources, accessed February 28, 2016, <http://www.lifeway.com/n/Product-Family/True-Love-Waits>

social context, I also found a persisting theological narrative that helped to explain the convoluted power dynamics between men and women. In all of the discussions of the power women have over men, the temptations young people face today, and the inability to perform gender correctly, the story of Adam and Eve and the fall subtly recurs.

Some authors, such as John Eldredge, believe that the problems men and women have today with being authentically masculine and feminine are directly related to the nature of the mistakes they made in the Garden of Eden. Adam was passive, therefore men today are passive, scared and hiding from God; Eve was not passive enough, therefore today she continues to overstep her boundaries and is overly controlling. He and others interpret these problems as women acting overly masculine and men acting overly feminine. While Eldredge interprets today's perceived masculinity and femininity crisis as the result of the nature of Adam and Eve's first sin, other female authors add that feminism has been a major cause of destruction for both women and men. For purity authors, feminism is the work of Satan attempting to deceive and tempt women into grasping for more power than they should have. Satan succeeded in getting Eve to fail in the garden, and evangelicals believe he is succeeding in getting women to fail in the world today. That is why they need the fairy tale narrative. While the Bible serves as their ultimate source of authority, the roles that men and women play in the classic fairy tale narrative align perfectly with evangelicals' current understanding of masculinity and femininity. Despite the fact that the fairy tale is so prevalent in a popular culture that, for the most part, evangelicals condemn as destructive and sinful, the princess is an accessible and, according to the

purity movement, universally appealing character that stands as the antithesis to Eve. The classic fairy tale ends with a happily-ever-after because of a woman's ability to be submissive and pure. Eldredge may have put it best when he wrote, "[Eve] is the special target of the Evil One; he turns his most vicious malice against her. If he can destroy her or keep her captive, he can ruin the story."<sup>137</sup> The fairy tale narrative that the purity movement relies on certainly supports Eldredge's theory. Without a princess worth fighting for—a princess held captive by Satan, perhaps—the prince has nothing to do.

Purity books therefore put great pressure on young women, for, as the Wilson sisters write, "Foolish women corrupt everything that is wise and good and beautiful. They spread chaos, corruption, and death wherever they go."<sup>138</sup> It seems that certain beliefs regarding women's power have not changed recently. To those within purity culture, women are still Eve; women, if they do not fully submit to God and their husbands, will ruin everything. What is good and beautiful—that is, what conservative evangelicals believe God deems good and beautiful—is subject to ruin by a woman who does not understand her boundaries, boundaries set not by her but by the men in her life. The purity movement may appeal to young women's sense of power and their ability to choose to be abstinent and pure, but women in the purity movement have no choice in deciding what the boundaries are or how to act, only the choice to submit or not. While purity authors' positive valuation of female power may be due to the influence of feminism, the idea that women have power over men's decisions and actions is present in the very story of human creation. Just as Eve's biting into the fruit

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<sup>137</sup> Eldredge, *Wild at Heart*, 184.

<sup>138</sup> Black, Lewis, and Wilson, *Purely Woman*, 102.

cursed all of humanity, so contemporary women falling for the lies of feminism—being sexually active before marriage or overly independent—has monumental disastrous effects. Once women make any decision that breaches their guidelines, purity authors writing to women assert that women cannot expect men to be good to them or even good at all. Therefore, once again, it is up to women, not men, to save the story, but rather than saving the story by being heroic and courageous as people in the purity movement may expect the man to be, women must work to become submissive and silent heroines.

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