

Public Abstract

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Graduation Term: SP 2012

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Degree: MA

Title: Re-Delineating Paul's Boundaries of Porneia in the Early Church via the Sexually Available Bodies of First-Century Slaves

This work attempts to re-delineate Paul's theological boundaries of the category of sexual immorality or porneia in the early church by referencing the bodies of first-century slaves. It began with a recognition that most scholars of Paul's ideas of sexuality have failed to take heed of this stratum of Greco-Roman society, thus doing an injustice to Paul's full theology. I argue that since slaves were legally and culturally unable to protect the boundaries of their bodies against the sexual desires of their masters, which some have argued would have excluded them from the pure Christian community, that Paul would not have expected them to do so. Instead when Paul speaks of sexual immorality, most particularly in 1 Corinthians, he does so with a certain familiarity with the realities of servitude in the first-century. Paul's definition of porneia was not simply unlawful sex outside of marriage, as most scholars have argued, but was in fact imbued with notions of ontology, volition, and consent.