

# RE-DELINEATING PAUL'S BOUNDARIES OF *PORNEIA* IN THE EARLY CHURCH

## VIA THE SEXUALLY AVAILABLE BODIES OF FIRST-CENTURY SLAVES

Guy Adam Niederhauser

Dr. Rabia Gregory, Thesis Supervisor

### Abstract

This work attempts to re-delineate Paul's theological boundaries of sexual immorality, *porneia*, in the early church by way of the sexually available bodies of first-century slaves. While most scholars of Paul's ideas of sexuality have studied his theology on sexual immorality via the individual situations dealt with particularly at Corinth, this work seeks to outline a more broad theology that would be applicable not only to free individuals acting of their own accord, but those without the ability to control their bodies, i.e. the ancient slave. Using Jennifer Glancy's book, *Slavery in Early Christianity* as a point of reference, which argues that since slaves could not have held up to the high moral standard Paul insisted of his congregants in the realm of sexuality since their bodies were always at the disposal of their masters that they would have been excluded from participation in the early church, I attempt to re-imagine Paul's theology on sexuality with this stratum of Greco-Roman society and the early church in mind. I argue that when Paul spoke of sexual immorality or *porneia* that he did so with the knowledge that certain members of his communities would not be able to protect the boundaries of their bodies. Thus, for Paul, *porneia* was not sexual activity outside of marriage full stop, but was instead imbued with notions of ontology, volition, and consent. Since slaves were regarded as less than fully human in a Greco-Roman context, without the ability to control their bodies, Paul would not have expected them to reach this most ideal standard.