

14.12

On Shunning Fornication

The world of the New Testament was a patriarchal society that understood gender roles in ways that most people today would consider sexist.

The apostle Paul sometimes views women (especially prostitutes) as temptresses who might lure otherwise godly men into sin. Still, he never goes so far as to blame the women in a way that would excuse male behavior.

We may compare two texts that counsel young men to shun or flee fornication. The first was written by Paul around the middle of the first century CE. The second was written by an unknown Jewish teacher around the same time or perhaps up to a hundred years later.

1 Corinthians 6:15–20	<i>Testament of Reuben 2.13–17</i>¹
<p>Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? Should I therefore take the members of Christ and make them members of a prostitute? Never! Do you not know that whoever is united to a prostitute becomes one body with her? For it is said, “The two shall be one flesh.” But anyone united to the Lord becomes one spirit with him. Shun fornication! Every sin that a person commits is outside the body; but the fornicator sins against the body itself. Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, which you have from God, and that you are not your own? For you were bought with a price; therefore glorify God in your body.</p>	<p>For evil are women, my children; and since they have no power or strength over man, they use wiles by outward attractions, that they may draw him to themselves. And whom they cannot bewitch by outward attractions, him they overcome by craft.</p> <p>For moreover, concerning them, the angel of the Lord told me, and taught me, that women are overcome by the spirit of fornication more than men, and in their heart they plot against men; and by means of their adornment they deceive first their minds, and by the glance of the eye instill the poison, and then through the accomplished act they take them captive.</p>

	<p>For a woman cannot force a man openly, but by a harlot's bearing she beguiles him.</p> <p>Flee, therefore, fornication, my children, and command your wives and your daughters, that they adorn not their heads and faces to deceive the mind: because every woman who uses these wiles has been reserved for eternal punishment.</p>
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1. *Testament of Rueben*, trans. Rutherford H. Platt Jr., 1926. Available online at <http://www.sacred-texts.com/bib/fbe/fbe268.htm>.