

# THE NEW TESTAMENT HAUSTAFELN PASSAGES

by John Brunt

## Chapter 1 -- Introduction

This paper presents a brief study of the New Testament Haustafeln<sup>1</sup> passages and their significance for understanding the role of women today, especially the role of women in the church. This study must be extremely selective, for a number of monograph length studies have been done on the subject<sup>2</sup>, and therefore a study of this size cannot begin to duplicate all of the material that is included in those much longer studies. Therefore, in order to limit this paper to the suggested size, there can be no detailed history of research or recounting of all exegetical details. Rather, the paper adopts the following procedure.

We shall first give a survey of selected studies on the Haustafeln over the past 15 years. These particular authors have been selected because they provide a diversity of views that will raise important issues for our exegetical study. The five

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<sup>1</sup>A German word for "household tables or codes" that give advice to the members of the household about proper behavior within the household.

<sup>2</sup>In addition to the works of Crouch and Balch cited below, examples include Kenneth W. Dupar, A Study in New Testament Haustafeln, (Dissertation (Edinburgh, 1971)); J. Paul Sampley, "And the Two Shall Become One Flesh": A Study of Traditions in Ephesians 5:21-33, SNTSMS 16 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971); D. Schroeder, Die Haustafeln des Neuen Testament: Ihre Herkunft und ihr theologischer Sinn, Dissertation (Hamburg, 1959); and Karl Weidinger, Die Haustafeln, ein Stück urchristlicher Paraenese, UNT 14 (Leipzig: J. C. Heinrich, 1928).

authors to be surveyed are Crouch, Balch, Fiorenza, Hurley, and Yoder.

Following this survey of contemporary treatments of the Haustafeln, we will turn to material that is roughly contemporary with the New Testament. Although there are no precise parallels to the New Testament Haustafeln passages, it is important to view the New Testament material against the backdrop of contemporary attitudes. Relevant Greco-Roman and Jewish authors will be surveyed.

The next chapter will cover the New Testament Haustafeln passages themselves. We shall treat four passages, and in each case the focus will be on the specific material relating to husbands and wives. The passages are Colossians 3:18-19, Ephesians 5:21-33, 1 Peter 3:1-8, and Titus 2:1-5.

When this task has been completed, we shall attempt to summarize our findings from the New Testament material, first by showing the meaning and significance of the Haustafeln passages within their context, and finally by discussing, the relevance of this material for the role of women and for the question of ordination of women to ministry.

## Chapter 2 -- Survey of Treatments

As noted above, this section will be limited to several representative treatments of the Haustafeln over the past 15 years. By surveying these treatments we will see the range of

possibilities for interpreting these passages and the issues that have been debated and discussed in the history of their interpretation. This will help us focus on the significant issues to be discussed when we move to the passages themselves.

Crouch. James Crouch's 1972 study was originally a dissertation at Tübingen.<sup>3</sup> It focuses on the intention of the Colossian Haustafel, but also devotes much attention to the origin to the Haustafeln in general.

With regard to origin, Crouch recognizes that there is no exact parallel to the Colossians Haustafel outside of the New Testament.<sup>4</sup> He believes that the laws of Greek ethics play a role, though an indirect one, in the origin of the Haustafeln.<sup>5</sup> He says, for instance,

[A] list of duties referring to husbands and wives, fathers and children, masters and slaves is conceivable within the context of the popularized Stoicism of the Roman Empire.<sup>6</sup>

But according to Crouch, the trend of the emancipation of women in the Roman period makes it difficult to imagine Stoic or wandering philosophers saying that wives should be subject to their husbands.<sup>7</sup> Thus even though it has been popular since

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<sup>3</sup>James E. Crouch, The Origin and Intention of the Colossians Haustafel (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1972).

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 146.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., pp. 37-73.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., p. 73

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., p. 107.

Dibelius to speak of the Haustafeln as Stoic ethical material, Crouch looks elsewhere for the closest parallels the Haustafeln.

Crouch holds that while the Roman world showed a tendency toward emancipation, the Oriental tendency toward the inferiority of women was intensified in Judaism during the Hellenistic period.<sup>99</sup> It is in this Hellenistic Jewish environment that Crouch sees the background of the origin of the Haustafeln.

The specific life setting was Hellenistic Jewish propaganda. He finds similarities between this Hellenistic Jewish material and the New Testament not only in content (the submission of wives) but also in form, for the Hellenistic Jewish material often stresses the reciprocal nature of social duties as do the New Testament Haustafeln.<sup>100</sup> After Crouch surveys Josephus and Philo (whose strong statements concerning the inferiority of women we will see in the following chapter) he goes on to say, "This is the essence of what the Haustafel demands of Christian wives."<sup>101</sup>

According to Crouch, the move from Hellenistic Jewish propaganda to Christianity came against the backdrop of a clash between enthusiastic and nomistic tendencies in Hellenistic Christianity. The Haustafeln are a reaction against the pneumatic excesses that threaten the stability of the Pauline churches by the enthusiastic wing. The nomistic wing attempted

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<sup>99</sup>Ibid., p. 108.

<sup>100</sup>Ibid., p. 119.

<sup>101</sup>Ibid., p. 109.

to curb these enthusiastic excesses by emphasizing that social duty was a part of Christian responsibility. Crouch believes that the exhortations in the Haustafeln to the subordinate members were primary. These exhortations were originally concerned with the excesses of women and slaves and were directed toward these two groups. As the Haustafeln became more formalized, they included children as well. Finally, on the basis of the analogy to Hellenistic Jewish material, where reciprocity is emphasized, instructions to husbands, fathers, and masters were also added.<sup>11</sup>

Crouch therefore sees an evolutionary process that leads to the New Testament Haustafeln. The Haustafeln are rooted in the soil of Hellenistic Jewish propaganda, influenced by the concepts of duty in Greek ethics, and come to fruition in the nomistic tendency of Hellenistic Christianity in the Pauline churches.

Balch. Balch's study focuses on the Haustafel in 1 Peter<sup>12</sup> and is also of monograph length. As with Crouch, Balch also speaks to the Haustafeln in general.

Balch takes 1 Peter 3:15 as the key to the Petrine Haustafel. Here Christian slaves and wives are told to be prepared to give a "defense" for their faith. According to

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<sup>11</sup>Ibid., pp. 144-145.

<sup>12</sup>David L. Balch, Let Wives be Submissive: The Domestic Code in 1 Peter, SBLMS 26 (Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1981). For a summary of previous research on the Haustafeln see pp. 2-10, and for a summary of research on 1 Peter see pp. 10-15.



Balch, this is more than a theological explanation but includes the example of lifestyle. Therefore, the Haustafeln are essentially apologetic and are given especially with reference to divided households.<sup>13</sup>

On the subject of origin, Balch emphasizes that the pattern of submission in the household was a common topos in the Greco-Roman world and is seen in Plato and Aristotle. It was available throughout the Hellenistic age.<sup>14</sup> It was used by middle Platonists, Peripatetics, Stoics, Epicurians, Hellenistic Jews, and Neo-Pythagoreans.<sup>15</sup> The topos goes back to Aristotle who says that the smallest parts of the household are the master/slave, husband/wife, and father/child relationships.<sup>16</sup> The 1 Peter Haustafel is basically an adaptation of the Aristotelian topos "on household management."<sup>17</sup>

Balch posits the following scenario for the Christian use of this topos. Jews and Christians inherited Greco-Roman criticisms originally directed against mystery cults. A major issue in this criticism involved the behavior of women, especially when they had adopted religious beliefs and practices independent of their husbands. This made their relationship to the husband

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

<sup>14</sup>Ibid., pp. 23-29 for Plato and pp. 33-38 for Aristotle.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid., see pp. 38-39 for the Peripatetics, pp. 51-52 for the Stoics, pp. 52-56 for the Hellenistic Jews, and pp. 56-58 for the Neo Pythagoreans.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid., pp. 61-62.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid., p. 109.

problematic. It was also charged that these foreign religions produced immorality and sedition. Josephus used the household management topos apologetically to refute charges against Judaism. 1 Peter is also apologetic. The social situation of Christians is being criticized, especially when pagan husbands demand that their wives give up a foreign religion. The Hauستafel in 1 Peter speaks to this situation.<sup>19</sup>

Balch contrasts this apologetic function of the Hauستafeln with views that see their background in paraenesis (Dibelius and Weidinger), social repression (Schroeder and Crouch), and mission (Selywn and Schroeder).<sup>17</sup>

Balch identifies four stages in the development of attitudes toward women in the early church. The first is the radical stance of liberation found in Jesus. The second is the freedom for women found in the pre-Pauline and Pauline churches. The Hauستafeln or domestic codes are adopted during the third stage, and the final fourth stage gives up the stance of liberation found in Jesus and Paul and uncritically accepts the current culture. Balch argues that the Hauستafeln therefore move away from the stance of Jesus and Paul.<sup>20</sup>

Yoder. John Howard Yoder's treatment of the Hauستafeln comes as a chapter within his popular book, The Politics of

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<sup>19</sup>Ibid., pp. 81-109.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid., pp. 107-108.

<sup>20</sup>Oral presentation by David Balch at the Women in the Biblical World section of the annual meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature in Atlanta, Georgia, November 23, 1986.

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Jesus.<sup>21</sup> The title of this chapter points to the basic thrust of Yoder's treatment. It is "Revolutionary Subordination." In this chapter, Yoder attacks the views of Dibelius, who had held that the Haustafeln were borrowed from Stoicism because Jesus' ethic was inadequate for practical life in the Christian community after the kingdom did not come as Jesus expected. Dibelius saw the Haustafeln as presenting an essentially conservative social ethic.<sup>22</sup> In contrast to Dibelius, Yoder emphasizes that the Haustafeln are distinctively different from material found in Stoicism. He lists these differences as follows.

First, Stoics call people to live up to their own nature, where the New Testament calls them to live up to the relationship itself. This is seen in the fact that Stoic material speaks to individual responsibilities while the New Testament Haustafeln are in pairs addressing those on both sides of the relationship.<sup>23</sup> Second, Stoicism places the nouns in the singular, while in the New Testament material they are in the plural. Thus it is the community rather than the self-determination of the individual that is in view.<sup>24</sup> Third, Stoics try to get at the nature of what is, while the New Testament commands are uniformly imperative like the apodictic laws of the

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<sup>21</sup>John Howard Yoder, The Politics of Jesus, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972).

<sup>22</sup>Ibid., pp. 166-169.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid., pp. 171-172.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid., p. 172.



Old Testament.<sup>25</sup> Fourth, Stoics address man in his dignity, while the New Testament addresses the subordinate person first. The subordinate person is treated as an agent who is a moral decision maker. Even though in the culture the subordinate individuals had no legal or moral status, in the New Testament they are assigned personal, moral responsibility.<sup>26</sup> Fifth, the Stoics represent human dignity and detachment, where the New Testament emphasizes willing subordination.<sup>27</sup> Sixth, there are different motives and sanctions in the Stoic and New Testament material. The New Testament includes the example of Jesus and the need for witness to the world.<sup>28</sup> Finally, the New Testament calls on the dominant partner to share in subordination. In other words, it points to a mutual subordination.<sup>29</sup>

Yoder then attempts to show, by a process of elimination, that these distinctive features cannot be accounted for in either the Greco-Roman or Jewish world. He concludes that the only remaining source is Jesus Himself.<sup>30</sup>

According to Yoder, the Haustafeln demand a revolutionary subordination where Christians are called upon to live according to the new order that has already come to the world through Jesus

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<sup>25</sup>Ibid., pp. 172-173.

<sup>26</sup>Ibid., pp. 173-174.

<sup>27</sup>Ibid., pp. 174-179.

<sup>28</sup>Ibid., pp. 179-180.

<sup>29</sup>Ibid., pp. 180-182.

<sup>30</sup>Ibid., p.182.

and is the expression of true freedom. Yoder says,

The subordinate person becomes a free ethical agent when he voluntarily accedes to his subordination in the power of Christ instead of bowing to it either fatalistically or resentfully. The claim is not that there is immediately a new world regime which violently replaces the old: but rather the old and the new order exist concurrently at different levels.<sup>31</sup>

This subordination frees the Christian from needing to smash the structures of this world since he or she recognizes that they are about to crumble anyway.<sup>32</sup>

Hurley. Hurley's treatment of the Haustafeln comes as a part of his book-length treatment of the subject, Man and Woman in Biblical Perspective.<sup>33</sup> Hurley writes from the standpoint of an evangelical who is interested in maintaining the authority of Scripture and its relevance for today. His primary emphasis is that the New Testament Haustafeln do present a hierarchical view of marriage in which women are called upon to be subordinate. He does not show concern with background questions on the origin of the Haustafeln, but looks at three passages in detail, the Haustafeln of Ephesians 5, 1 Peter 3, and 1 Timothy 2.

In the Ephesians 5 passage, Hurley emphasizes that verse 21 does not represent the mutual submission of wives to husbands and

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<sup>31</sup>Ibid., p. 191.

<sup>32</sup>Ibid., p. 192.

<sup>33</sup>James B. Hurley, Man and Woman in Biblical Perspective (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1981).

husbands to wives.<sup>34</sup> He believes that this statement focuses only on the wives, children, and slaves. He also argues that the submission that is called for is not submitting to the needs of each other as self-sacrificing love, as tempting as it might be to see it in that way. Rather, Ephesians calls upon the wives to yield to the authority of their husbands.<sup>35</sup> He bases this on the word ὑποτάσσω which, according to Hurley, cannot mean mutual submission but involves submitting to the authority of another. Hurley also sees this submission to authority in the emphasis on Christ and the husband as the head of the church and wife respectively. Headship, he says, implies authority, not origin or unity.<sup>36</sup>

Hurley emphasizes the same issues with regard to the Haupttafel in 1 Peter 3.<sup>37</sup> He argues that the submission and yielding to authority that is demanded is not just circumstantial, a good strategy to use with a non-Christian husband, but is a part of God's divinely ordained plan from creation. After noting certain differences in the approaches of Paul in Ephesians 5 and Peter in 1 Peter 3, Hurley concludes,

Despite the differences of approach, however, both present a hierarchical view of marriage and neither grounds that view in issues which are culturally relative. The crucial theological

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<sup>34</sup>See Ibid., pp. 138-152 for his treatment of Ephesians 5:21-33.

<sup>35</sup>Ibid., pp. 143-144.

<sup>36</sup>Ibid., pp. 144-148.

<sup>37</sup>Ibid., pp. 152-167.

elements of Peter and Paul include the relation of Christ and the church, the suffering of Christ, the self-sacrifice of Christ, the lives of holy women which are of great worth in the sight of God, doing what is right, and the fact that husbands and wives are fellow-heirs. Significantly, none of these are culturally relative. The actual views of Peter and Paul, as reflected in the texts studied, offer no grounds for viewing the 'headship' of the husband as a first-century application of the gospel message which is not applicable to the present.<sup>39</sup>

Hurley specifically argues that the advice given in the Haustafeln concerning marriage differs from that given for the master-slave relationship.<sup>40</sup> Even though advice is given to both wives and slaves, our understanding of the cultural relativity of slavery cannot influence our understanding of the advice to wives, for the subordination of wives was divinely established at creation. This was not the case with slaves.

In treating 1 Timothy 2, Hurley also emphasizes the theme of hierarchy. He believes that Paul is saying that women will be kept safe from wrongly seizing a man's role by embracing women's role, as symbolized by childbirth, and remaining subordinate.<sup>41</sup>

Thus, in contrast to Yoder, who sees the Haustafeln as a paradigm for us supporting mutual submission, Hurley looks at the same material and also sees a paradigm for us, but sees that paradigm supporting the need for women to yield to authority in a structured, hierarchical marriage relationship.

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<sup>39</sup>Ibid., p. 157.

<sup>40</sup>Ibid., pp. 157-161.

<sup>41</sup>Ibid., p. 222.

Fiorenza. Elisabeth Schüssler-Fiorenza treats the Haustafeln passages within the context of her major feminist theological reconstruction of Christian origins.<sup>41</sup> Her basic position is that Colossians, Ephesians, the Pastorals, and even 1 Peter stand in the post of Pauline tradition, and all advocate the adoption of Greco-Roman patriarchal order. This patriarchal order demands the subordination and submission of the socially weaker party, i.e., women. The Haustafeln were originally introduced into Christianity to lessen the tensions between Christian freedom and pagan patriarchal order in the household and were later applied to the communal self-understanding of the church as the household of God.<sup>42</sup>

The writer of Colossians uses the traditional code, not because of his interest in wives, but rather in slaves. He spiritualizes and moralizes the baptismal community understanding expressed in Galatians 3:28 and makes the Greco-Roman household ethic a part of Christian social ethic.<sup>43</sup>

The author of 1 Peter sees the household code as a form of apology for the Christian faith. He tries to relieve the tension caused by people leaving their family religion and wants to strengthen the rejection of the old religion for Christianity.

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<sup>41</sup>Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, In Memory of Her: A Feminist Theological Reconstruction of Christian Origins (New York: Crossroad, 1983).

<sup>42</sup>Ibid., p. 245.

<sup>43</sup>Ibid., p. 253.



But he does so by relinquishing the new freedom of these slaves and women who had become members of the new priestly people. By presenting a strategy that lessens the tension between the Christian community and the pagan patriarchal household, he introduces patriarchal societal ethics into the church where it replaces a genuine Christian vision of equality.<sup>44</sup>

The author of Ephesians Christologically cements the inferior position of the wife in the marriage relationship. Subordination of the wife to the husband becomes a religious duty. While the author tries to Christianize the domestic instructions of the Greco-Roman culture, he fails and rather reinforces the social structures of domination by theologizing them.<sup>45</sup>

Thus, for Fiorenza the Haustafeln represent a falling away from the freedom that both Jesus and Paul brought and a return to the patriarchal structures of domination of the surrounding culture.

Conclusions. If this selected survey reveals nothing else, it shows that the range of interpretation with regard to the Haustafeln passages is great. Hardly any aspect of their interpretation can claim scholarly consensus. For example, for Yoder they point to mutuality and equality, a situation of revolutionary mutual subordination; but for both Hurley and Fiorenza, they point to patriarchalism and hierarchy. And yet

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<sup>44</sup>Ibid., pp. 262-266.

<sup>45</sup>Ibid., p. 270.

Hurley sees this as a positive paradigm for Christians, whereas Florenza sees it as a degeneration from Jesus and Paul. In other words, the same material can lead to quite opposite conclusions. From this survey a number of issues emerge that must demand our attention through the remainder of this paper. First, is the question of origin. Are the Hausstafeln borrowed from Stoic materials, Hellenistic Jewish propaganda, or are they original with the New Testament? Or, do they go back to Jesus? Second, there is the question of historical development within the New Testament. Do the Hausstafeln represent a degeneration from the Pauline church? Most of our authors see them as post-Pauline. Can this be substantiated? Can historical development be seen within the New Testament? Third, what is the purpose of the Hausstafeln material within early Christianity? Do they serve to stifle liberation or are they a call to mutual submission that enhances equality and liberation? Finally, this survey raises the question of the authority of the Hausstafeln for us. Do they have continuing relevance or are they merely evidence of cultural relativity within Scripture that need no longer concern us? Before we seek answers to these questions by turning to the passages themselves, we must briefly survey the Greco-Roman and Jewish material that relates to the New Testament Hausstafeln.

Chapter 3 -- Greco-Roman and Jewish Material

As the last chapter has shown, there is much diversity on the question of the origin of the Hausstafeln. Although it has

been commonplace since Dibelius to find their roots in Stoicism, Balch would point us rather to the Aristotelian topos on household management, Crouch would point us to Hellenistic Jewish propaganda, and Yoder would point us to Jesus Himself. There is good reason for this diversity. It grows from the fact that there are no exact parallels to the New Testament Haustafeln in either Jewish or Greco-Roman literature. This lack of direct parallel leads to much speculation based on little data.

The New Testament material, however, should not be seen in isolation from the Jewish and Greco-Roman material on husband-wife relationships. Although we shall conclude from the following survey that it is impossible to trace the roots, evolution and development of the Haustafeln from this Greco-Roman and Jewish material, it is nevertheless important to see the New Testament Haustafeln against this backdrop. Thus, we are interested in the material not primarily to determine the origin of the Haustafeln, but rather to see how the New Testament material both compares and contrasts with its surrounding culture. What does it share with its culture? What is unique? What is the direction of the New Testament material with regard to its culture? We can only answer these questions if we have some understanding of the Jewish and Greco-Roman material. Again, however, the scope of this paper does not permit an exhaustive survey. It is hoped, however, that the selection is representative.

Greco-Roman Material. Seneca, the Roman moralist and philosopher who was a contemporary of Paul, points to the fact that advice concerning the husband-wife, father-child, and master-slave relationship was common to the first century philosophical enterprise. He specifically argues against those who would exclude such advice from philosophy when he says,

That department of philosophy which supplies precepts appropriate to the individual case, instead of framing them for mankind at large--which, for instance, advises how a husband should conduct himself toward his wife, or how a father should bring up his children, or how a master should rule his slaves--this department of philosophy, I say, is accepted by some as the only significant part, while the other departments are rejected on the ground that they stray beyond the sphere of practical needs--as if any man could give advice concerning a portion of life without having first gained a knowledge of some of life as a whole!<sup>44</sup>

Interest in such advice certainly goes back at least to Aristotle. Near the beginning of his Politics he discusses household management. He says,

And now that it is clear what are the component parts of the state, we have first of all to discuss household management; for every state is composed of households. Household management falls into departments corresponding to the parts of which the household in its turn is composed...The investigation of everything should begin with its smallest parts, and the primary and smallest parts of the household are master and slave, husband and wife, father and children; we ought therefore to examine the proper constitution and character of

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<sup>44</sup>Seneca, Ad Lucilium Epistulae Morales, trans. Richard M. Gummere, 3 vols., Loeb Classical Library (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1917-1925), #94, vol. 3, p. 11.

each of these three relationships.<sup>47</sup>

In the course of this discussion, Aristotle makes it clear that men are naturally superior to women. He says,

Also, as between the sexes, the male is by nature superior and the female inferior, the male ruler and the female subject.<sup>48</sup>

Without question there were tendencies within the Hellenistic culture to ameliorate this emphasis on female inferiority and subordination. Some of the Cynic epistles, for example, emphasize that women are worthy to study philosophy.<sup>49</sup> In fact, the emphasis on the importance of the study of philosophy leads to advice that the Cynic should not marry, although this advice is usually directed to men and ignores women.<sup>50</sup>

But even much of the advice that supposedly moves in the direction of emancipation would sound extremely offensive to our modern ears. Take, for example, the advice of Epictetus. He argues against the position that women are common property and sex objects whose favors can be demanded by men at will.

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<sup>47</sup>Aristotle, Politics, trans. H. Rackham, 2 vols., Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1944), 1253b, vol. 1, p. 13.

<sup>48</sup>Ibid., 1254b, vol. 1, p. 21..

<sup>49</sup>Diogenes to Hipparchia in The Cynic Epistles: A Study Edition, ed. and trans. Abraham J. Malherbe (Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1977), p. 95.

<sup>50</sup>Diogenes to Zeno, Ibid., p. 179, and Epictetus, Arrian's Discourses of Epictetus, trans. W. A. Oldfather, 2 vols., Loeb Classical Library (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1928), 3:22, vol. 2, pp. 155-159.



However, in the course of this argument he agrees that women are by nature common property. He uses the following analogy. When you are invited to a banquet and there is a pig on the table, the pig is common property, but you would not simply grab the whole thing. You eat only your part. He then concludes,

In the same way women also are by nature common property. But when the lawgiver, like the host at a banquet, has apportioned them, are you not willing like the rest to look for your own portion instead of filching away and glutting your greed upon that which is anothers?<sup>51</sup>

A Greco-Roman work of special significance is Plutarch's "Advice to Bride and Groom".<sup>52</sup> Here Plutarch addresses both the bride and the groom with instructions on their relationship to their spouses. Here there is certainly an emphasis on the dignity and emancipation of women. Women are urged to study philosophy<sup>53</sup> and are specifically addressed as responsible moral agents throughout. The dominant emphasis, however, is on the subordination of the women, although there is emphasis on mutuality. Plutarch actually uses the word ὑποτάσσω (subordinate) in the following statement on the wives' subordination. He says,

So it is with women also; if they subordinate themselves to their husbands, they are commended, but if they want to have control, they cut a sorrier figure than the subjects of their control.

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<sup>51</sup>Epictetus, 2:4, vol. 1, p. 237.

<sup>52</sup>Plutarch, "Advice to Bride and Groom" in Moralia, trans. Frank Cole Babbitt, et.al., 15 vols. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1927), vol. 2, pp. 299-343.

<sup>53</sup>Ibid., #48, pp. 337-339.

And control ought to be exercised by the man over the woman, not as the owner has control over a piece of property, but, as the soul controls the body, by entering into her feelings and being knit to her through good will. As, therefore, it is possible to exercise care over the body without being a slave to its pleasures and desires, so it is possible to govern a wife, and at the same time to delight and gratify her.<sup>34</sup>

So the husband is to delight and gratify his wife as he exercises control, but clearly the control is in his hands and the woman is to be subordinate.

Plutarch speaks to mutuality in the following statement.

As the mixing of liquids, according to what men of science say, extends throughout their entire content, so also in the case of married people there ought to be a mutual amalgamation of their bodies, property, friends, and relations.<sup>35</sup>

When one surveys Plutarch's actual advice, however, it appears that women certainly come out on the short end of this mutuality. For example, the woman is to be visible only with her husband and is to hide herself away when he is not present.<sup>36</sup> She is to give way to his leadership and preferences<sup>37</sup> and is to have no feelings of her own.<sup>38</sup> In matters of property, she is to recognize that the estate belongs to her husband even if she has contributed the larger share at the time of their marriage.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>34</sup>Ibid., #33, p. 323.

<sup>35</sup>Ibid., #34, p. 325.

<sup>36</sup>Ibid., #9, p. 305.

<sup>37</sup>Ibid., p. 11, p. 307.

<sup>38</sup>Ibid., #14, p. 309.

<sup>39</sup>Ibid., #20, p. 313.

With regard to religion, she is to serve the same gods as her husband.<sup>40</sup> Finally, while she is always to remain faithful to her husband, she is to be pleased if her husband shares his debauchery with a mistress instead of her.<sup>41</sup> These specific instructions give shape to Plutarch's command that the wives be subordinate.

A number of themes emerge from this brief survey of advice concerning the husband-wife relationship in the Greco-Roman world. Not all authors would share any one of these themes, but they are all found within at least some of the Greco-Roman material. First we note that there is a tendency to discuss the same three relationships that are included in the New Testament Hauptstufen, the husband-wife, master-slave, and parent-child relationships. We also find that women are considered inferior, although there is a tendency to move toward greater emancipation. This latter is seen in the emphasis that women are worthy of studying philosophy, and yet even within this tendency there is strong emphasis on subordination as seen in Plutarch. The subordination includes the wife giving in to the husband's desires with regard to religion as well as a number of other specific areas. It even includes a double standard with regard to sexual morality where the wife is demanded to be faithful at the same time that she is tolerant of her husband's infidelity.

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<sup>40</sup>Ibid., #19, p. 311.

<sup>41</sup>Ibid., #16, p. 309.

Jewish Material. The apocryphal work, Ecclesiasticus, or the Wisdom of Ben Sirach is interesting because on numerous occasions it addresses the patriarch of the household and gives specific advice concerning his treatment of wife, children, and slaves. Advice regarding treatment of wives includes the following.

If you have a wife after your own heart, do not divorce her;  
but do not trust yourself to one you cannot love. <sup>42</sup>

Women is the origin of sin,  
and it is through her that we all die.  
Do not leave a leaky cistern to drip  
Or allow a bad wife to say what she likes.  
If she does not accept your control,  
divorce her and send her away. <sup>43</sup>

Although most of the Jewish material is not as negative with regard to women as Ben Sirach, there is a strong emphasis on inferiority of women and subordination, as the following quote from Josephus shows. It should be noted that the word "submissive" in this statement is not ὑποτάσσω but ὑπακούω (obey).

The woman, says that Law, is in all things inferior to the man. Let her accordingly be submissive, not for her humiliation, but that she may be directed; for the authority has been given by God to the man. The husband must have union with his wife alone; it is impious to

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<sup>42</sup>Ecclesiasticus or the Wisdom of Ben Sirach 7:26-28, The New English Bible with Apocrypha (Oxford and Cambridge: University Presses, 1970).

<sup>43</sup>Ibid., 25:24-26.

assault the wife of another.<sup>64</sup>

The situation is similar in Philo. In the following statement he emphasizes that wives are to serve (δουλεύω), their husbands, but qualifies it by saying that they are not to be ill-treated. He says,

Wives must be in servitude to their husbands, a servitude not imposed by violent, ill-treatment but promoting obedience in all things.<sup>65</sup>

Another interesting source from Diaspora Judaism is Pseudo-Phocylides.<sup>66</sup> In the midst of a long list of commands regarding morality, including rules regarding adultery and incest, he includes advice to both husbands and wives, although the advice to women is given in the third person rather than by direct address. He emphasizes that men are not to remain unmarried lest they die nameless.<sup>67</sup> He admonishes husbands not to outrage their wives by shameful ways of intercourse or succumbing to unbridled sensuality toward them.<sup>68</sup> Then he says the following,

Love your own wife, for what is sweeter and better than whenever a wife is kindly disposed

<sup>64</sup>Josephus, Against Apion 2:201 in Josephus, trans. H. St. J. Thackeray, 8 vols., (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1926), vol. 1, p. 373.

<sup>65</sup>Philo, Hypothetica 7:3 in Philo, trans. F. H. Colson, 10 vols. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1941), vol. 9, p. 425.

<sup>66</sup>Pseudo-Phocylides in James H. Charlesworth, ed., The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha, 2 vols. (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1985).

<sup>67</sup>Ibid., #175, vol. 2, p. 580.

<sup>68</sup>Ibid., #189 and #193, vol. 2, p. 581.



toward (her) husband and a husband toward (his) wife till old age, without strife divisively interfering?<sup>42</sup>

Here we find a spirit of mutuality where the husband is to love his wife and both are to be kindly disposed toward each other.

This selection from Judaism is sufficient to show that there is much that these Jewish authors share with the broader Greco-Roman culture, but that there are also differences. Here again we see an emphasis on the inferiority of women. Statements about the subordination of women seem to be even stronger than in the Greco-Roman material, for here the words "obedience" and "servitude" are used. On the other hand, we see in Pseudo-Phocylides a stronger emphasis on mutuality than we had seen in the Greco-Roman material. Finally, a major difference in the Jewish material is the strong emphasis on sexual fidelity for the male as well as the female.

Conclusions. In this survey of Greco-Roman and Jewish materials we see no precise parallels to the New Testament Haustafel. We do see, however, that it was common in the culture of both the Greco-Roman and Jewish world to speak of the husband-wife relationship. We have noted the major themes that emerge from both the Greco-Roman and Jewish material and have noted that there are both similarities and differences between them.

From this data, it is impossible to trace a line of

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<sup>42</sup>Ibid., #195-197, vol. 2, p. 581.

development to the New Testament Haustafeln that explains the latter's origin. What we can do, however, as we move to the New Testament material itself, is keep this survey before our eyes so that we can determine the extent to which the New Testament shares its emphases with the prevailing culture and the extent to which it challenges that culture and offers unique perspectives. We now turn to the New Testament material.

#### Chapter 4 -- The Haustafeln Passages

Since it is impossible within the scope of a paper of this size to cover all exegetical details, it is necessary to lay down certain procedures. First, we shall not cover the history of research on the interpretation of each passage nor will we give a survey of the secondary material that is found in commentaries. We shall delete technical matters that are not of relevance to the particular topic at hand, such as textual variants and translation problems.

What we will do is focus on the major issues already raised from our representative survey of secondary literature. We will also limit major discussion to the husband-wife relationship portions of the Haustafeln passages. Our major focus will be the overall meaning of each passage.

The four passages to be studied are Colossians 3, Ephesians 5, Titus 2, and 1 Peter 3. They will be covered in that order. These are the only four passages that strictly follow the Haustafeln form and include the husband-wife relationship.

We must admit that while there are excellent reasons for supporting the Pauline authorship of Colossians and Ephesians, the situation with the Pastorals is more difficult. The major differences in vocabulary and style demand some explanation, and no present explanation solves all the problems. But the evidence that is usually presented to show a major degeneration in perspective from Paul to the Pastorals is overblown, and it is best to treat them as Pauline, with the recognition that they are in some ways removed from the other Pauline letters by some different process of authorship.

Colossians 3:18-19. The first matter of significance in this passage is its relationship to its context. A number of commentators point to the lack of any connective conjunction or particle at the beginning of verse 18 and take this as evidence that our passage is isolated from its context and should be seen as general, formalized advice. Although it is true that this material is formalized and does not appear in a polemic context, there does appear to be a general but definite link with Paul's

sixties.<sup>20</sup> writings are considered to have been written before the mid and that 1 Peter was written by Peter. Thus, all of these that Colossians, Ephesians, and Titus were all written by Paul period of several decades. It will be our assumption, however, New Testament material that assumes varying authorship over a such as Crouch, Balch, and Fiorenza see a development within the chapter 2 due to the consideration of authorship. Commentators with the conclusions of some of the views covered above in individual passages. Our study will be in basic disagreement One other matter must be treated before we move to the

moral teaching in this section of the epistle.

Paul begins the chapter by calling upon the Colossians to set their minds on things above. He then moves to discuss the moral life under the metaphor of taking off the old way of life and putting on a new, a metaphor which probably has reference to baptism. After this Paul moves to the theological and ethical significance of unity in Christ which baptism creates. In verse 11 he emphasizes equality. All are one in Christ. Therefore Christians should live in unity in one body and in peace. This unifying fellowship includes worship together.

It is a logical step that Paul should move from this emphasis on unity, equality, and fellowship to the closest interpersonal relationships, those of the household, which includes the relationships of husband-wife, parent-child, and slave-master. In other words, there is much more logical progression here in Paul's moral thought than is often noticed. This is not without exegetical significance. The household code must not be divorced from its context. It is placed within the sphere of overall responsibility in Christ to live at peace and recognize all Christians as equals. The context of the Colossian Haustafel is unity in Christ.

We should also notice the structure of the Haustafel section. Notice that all three basic relationships are addressed. We see something new here, however, that has not been seen in previous material. Here in each case the usually subordinate person is addressed first. Then the person usually

in authority is addressed. As we have seen in the previous chapter, there is no specific precedent for all six roles, i.e. wife, husband, child, parent, slave and master, being addressed in turn. The effect of this element of structure is to give increased dignity to each member, who is addressed individually as an active moral agent. The effect also is to give greater responsibility to those who are usually understood as the individuals of privilege in the household.

It is also important to notice that it is slaves who receive the most detailed admonition in this Haustafel. The other five roles are addressed with simple, brief admonitions, whereas slaves are addressed in some detail. This is probably due to the specific historical context of Colossians. The occasion of its sending is undoubtedly the return of the runaway slave, Onesimus, to his master (see Colossians 4:9).

The basic structure of each section of the Haustafel is the same. First, the class of individuals is addressed. A command follows the address, and finally, a motivation or sanction for the command is given. This brings us to the specific section of the Haustafel that addresses wives and husbands. In keeping with the structure that the usually subordinate person is addressed first, the Haustafel begins with admonition to the wives.

The first admonition to wives is that they be submissive (ὁποταγῆν). This contrasts with the initial admonition to both children and slaves who are instructed to "obey."

The motivation for this submission to the husband is that



which is fitting or proper in the Lord. Paul uses this word for "fitting" or "proper" in only two other passages. In Ephesians 5:4, he says that obscenity, foolish talk, and coarse joking are not proper, and in Philemon 8, he tells Philemon that he could command him to do what is proper though he chooses a different course. The term is a broad term and does not specify whether it means "proper" in a cultural or a religious sense. Paul leaves no doubt as to his intent here, however, for he adds the words "in the Lord." Although some suggest that Paul simply adds these words to give a religious aura and sanction to common cultural advice, the words are much more significant for Paul. They show that he sees one's responsibilities in the marital relationship as a part of one's grateful devotion to God. Even those things that might be considered common cultural duties are transformed for the Christian into a significant part of her or his devotion to God.

Before we move to Paul's admonitions to the husbands, it is important to observe what is missing from the admonition to the wives. They are not told to "obey," nor is there any hint of female inferiority such as we found in some of the Greco-Roman and Jewish material.

Paul gives two pieces of advice to the husbands. The first is positive, the second is an explanation of the first stated in negative terms. After the initial address husbands are told to love their wives. Paul then tells them they are not to be embittered "against" their wives. Michaelis suggests that the

preposition "against" is unusual and may refer to bitterness that is vented on the wife, though not caused by her.<sup>71</sup> Whether or not this is true, the admonition makes love specific by giving a concrete prohibition.

When taken as a whole, this admonition to wives and husbands is beautiful in its simplicity and its brevity. By giving specific commands to both wife and husband, it emphasizes mutuality and reciprocal responsibility in the husband-wife relationship as a part of the Christian's overall commitment to unity and peace. Contra Crouch<sup>72</sup>, however, there does not appear to be a polemic or even corrective thrust.

Ephesians 5:21-33. The advice to wives and husbands in the Ephesian Haustafel is similar but greatly expanded in comparison with what we have seen in Colossians. In treating this passage there are several basic issues that come into view. How is the passage related to its context? Does it point to mutual submission of husbands and wives or only to the submission of wife to husband? What is the meaning of headship for Christ and for the husband? Finally, what is the overall meaning and relevance for wife and husband?

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<sup>71</sup>Wilhelm Michaelis, "ἡ ἀγάπη" in Theological Dictionary of the New Testament, trans. and ed. Geoffrey W. Bromiley, 10 vols., (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1968), vol. 6, p. 125, n. 16.

<sup>72</sup>See above pp. 4-5.

We turn first to the matter of context.<sup>79</sup> In order to understand the structure of the passage, we must go back to Ephesians 5:18 where Paul exhorts Christians not to get drunk with wine which leads to debauchery, but rather to be filled with the Spirit. This imperative that Christians be filled with the Spirit is followed by four participles. Although participles can be used as independent imperatives in Koine Greek, here they are clearly subordinate to the initial command to be filled with the Spirit. In other words, these four participles show what it is for a person to be filled with the Spirit. Life in the Spirit involves these four activities. The four participles are "speaking," "singing," "giving thanks," and "submitting" to each other. The structure can be seen in the following chart.

But be filled with the Spirit
<u>Speaking</u> to each other with psalms, hymns, and
spiritual songs
<u>Singing</u> in your heart to the Lord
<u>Giving thanks</u> always on behalf of everything in
the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God
the Father
<u>Submitting</u> yourselves to each other in the fear
of Christ
Wives...
Husbands...
Children...
Fathers...
Slaves...
Masters...

This shows that contextually the whole Haustafel section in Ephesians is part of what it means to be filled with the Spirit--

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<sup>79</sup>In this section I am indebted to an oral presentation by Scott Bartchy in the Women in the Biblical World section of the annual meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature in Atlanta, Georgia, November 23, 1986.

for Paul being filled with the Spirit issues in fellowship, worship, and the appropriate moral response to other human beings.

Once this structure is clear, it is obvious that verse 21 plays a pivotal role. It is not only the fourth of the participles that follow the command to be filled, but it is also the heading for all of the admonitions that follow to wives, husbands, children, fathers, slaves, and masters. But as the heading for the whole section, what does it mean?

Hurley has argued that verse 21 is grammatically related to what precedes and to what follows and marks a transition, but he holds that it does not call for mutual submission.<sup>74</sup> For Hurley, the call for submission only refers to half of the subsequent addressees. That is, the wives, children, and slaves. He says,

Some recent discussions of Ephesians 5 have interrupted Hypotasso (submit) in verse 21 as though it called upon husbands and wives, parents and children, slaves and masters to submit to the needs of one another, i.e. to allow the needs of the other to come before their own needs and to alter their behavior for the sake of the other. Used in this way the word points in the direction of self-sacrificing love. This, of course, is the pattern of Christ's love for the church, the pattern held out by Paul for husbands in Ephesians 5:25-31. This interpretation would provide a sense in which both husband and wife are "submissive" to (yielding to the needs of) one another. Attractive though it would be, it is not compatible with the use of the word anywhere else in the New Testament.<sup>75</sup>

But for two different reasons Hurley's position is wrong.

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<sup>74</sup>Hurley, pp. 140-144.

<sup>75</sup>Ibid., p. 143.

First, contextually and linguistically verse 21 is seen as the heading for what follows. That is clear from the arrangement that is outlined above. It is also clear from the lack of the word "submit" in verse 22, for the textual evidence favors the omission of "submit" in verse 22. Not only is it omitted in P46 and Vaticanus, but the manuscripts that do include it in verse 22 do so in different forms and positions.<sup>76</sup> Thus, the structure is as follows.

Submitting yourself to each other in the fear  
of Christ.

Wives, to your husbands as to the Lord.

The very fact that the word "submit" is not used in verse 22 shows that verse 21 is a heading for the whole. It is most logical that this heading would apply to the whole as not just to half of the relationship.

Hurley also objects because he claims that the word submit (ὑποτάσσω) cannot refer to mutuality. This leads us to the second reason why Hurley's position is inadequate. What Hurley fails to recognize is the unique juxtaposition of the word submit and the word translated to "each other" (ἀλλήλοις). There is

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<sup>76</sup>The textual evidence is as follows:

"Submit" is omitted in P46 and Vaticanus. It is added after the word "husband" as a second person imperative in K, 181, 326, 614, 630, and 1984.

It is added after the word "wives" as a second person imperative in D, G, and 1985.

It is added after the word "wives" as a third person imperative in  $\Psi$ .

It is added after the word "husbands" as a third person imperative in Sinaiticus, A, I, P, 33, 81, 88, 104 and several others.

This diversity suggests that it was added by various scribes according to the analogy of verse 21.



only one other verse in the New Testament where these two words come together, and that is 1 Peter 5:5. However, the words there are separated and appear in different clauses. Peter says, "Young men be subject to the older, all of you clothe yourselves with humility toward each other." But here the words are in direct relationship to each other. Paul admonishes Christians to "submit to each other."

Hurley is right in saying that the normal use of the word "submit" does not include mutuality. In fact, he is correct when he says that the word is never used in this way elsewhere in the New Testament. At least it is not used in quite the same way. But what he fails to recognize is the unprecedented use of the term with the reciprocal pronoun "each other." This unprecedented use changes the connotation of submission. Even though the word ordinarily expresses submission to authority, it is here tied with a word that expresses reciprocity and mutuality. This unique combination of words takes the word "submit" out of its normal semantic context and transforms the meaning. When these two words are placed together, "submit" does not have the connotation of hierarchical authority but of mutuality and reciprocity. We must take the command "submit to each other" seriously. The fact that the words are not usually put together must not deter us from understanding the radical nature of this command. In this Haustafel we find a new emphasis on the mutuality of household relationships that we do not find in any previous literature.

It is true that this mutually submissive relationship takes a somewhat different form in the instruction to the wife as compared with the instruction to the husband. The wife is to submit (again the word obey is not used) and to respect (verse 33) her husband. On the other hand, the husband is to love his wife as Christ loved the church. This includes his willingness to die for her.

In this Hauستafel there is a clear heightening of the husband's responsibility. We must remember that husbands were usually in the position of privilege, and most of the material that we saw in both the Greco-Roman and Jewish world pointed to that privilege. But here the husband's privilege is transformed into servanthood and responsibility. Note the list of commands made to the husband.

He is to love his wife as Christ loved the church.  
He is to love her as he loves his own body.  
By implication he is to nourish and cherish the wife.  
He is even to be willing to die for her.

All of this raises the question of the meaning of headship in this passage, for Paul does say that the husband is the head of the wife even as Christ is the head of the church. What does it mean to be "head"? Hurley argues with those who would focus on origin as the meaning of headship.<sup>77</sup> He claims that the word points to authority rather than origin.

It is true that the idea of origin is not sufficient content for this expression. But it is also true that the word points to

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<sup>77</sup>Hurley, pp. 145-146.

more than mere authority. We must understand what it is that Christ does as the head. In Ephesians 1:10, Christ is the one who sums all things in the universe up under one head. Headship brings unity and reconciliation, and Christ accomplishes by His sacrificial service.

Therefore, the debate between whether headship points to origin or authority is misplaced. What is significant is that the authority of headship is subsumed by a new servanthood. Headship is seen not as privilege but as service. This is revealed in Jesus Christ Himself.

That the male was the head of the wife was an affirmation of cultural reality, and this headship was usually understood as privilege. What is different in this passage is the meaning of headship. The husband is the head even as Christ is the head. Thus, headship finds its reality in servanthood. This truth that headship is servanthood is consistent with verse 21 which calls for mutual submission. Husbands and wives are responsible to each other, and to the extent that the husband is head in this relationship of mutuality, his headship will be seen not in privilege but in service.

Therefore, the overall thrust of this passage is the mutual submission of the husbands and wives to each other as a part of their being filled with the Spirit. For wives, this means submission to and respect for their husbands. For husbands, it means a love that yields the fruit of self-sacrificial service even to the point of death for the wife. The dominant theme here

is not hierarchy but mutuality. In fact, the degree of mutuality that is seen here is greater than anything that we have seen in Greco-Roman or Jewish material. Therefore, we should take issue with Fiorenza, who claims that this Haustafel, while radically questioning patriarchal domination with reference to the example of Christ, in actuality cements the inferior position of women by giving it theological justification.<sup>78</sup> Rather, this Haustafel gives theological grounding to a new degree of mutuality in the marriage relationship.

Titus 2:1-5. It should first be noticed that the structure of this Haustafel is very different from the two we have previously studied. The genre of literature is different. This section, like the book of Titus as a whole, is in the form of a minister's manual. Therefore, it is Titus who is addressed rather than the individuals in the various household relationships. Titus is told that he is to teach various groups. These groups are older men, older women, young men, and slaves. Thus, husbands and wives are not directly included. However, wives appear indirectly in the instruction that Titus is to give to older women. Titus is to teach the older women so that they can teach the younger wives how to love their husbands and children, be self-controlled and pure, be homemakers, be good or kind, and be subject to their husbands. This twice-removed, indirect admonition to wives has no parallel for husbands in the

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<sup>78</sup>Fiorenza, p. 269.

passage.

Thus this passage is not really one of the Haustafeln in the strictest sense. It is similar, however, in that instructions are given for wives in the household. In addition, there is a different kind of motivation given for the wives' behavior in this case. Their submission does not merely have to do with the husband-wife relationship, but has a view to their witness. They are to be submissive so that the word of God may not be blasphemed (verse 5). In other words, while Colossians and Ephesians include only sanctions which focus in one way or another on the relationship itself, this motivation has to do with the perception of the relationship by those outside the church. Wives are to act in a certain manner in order to give a positive witness that does not blaspheme the word of God.

It may well be that the problem of Gnostic or at least Proto-Gnostic enthusiasm (an obvious problem addressed in the Pastorals) stands behind this advice.

Overall, the material in this Haustafel adds little to what we have already seen. This statement of submission seems to have placed stronger emphasis on the wife's fidelity to her husband, though of course that is assumed in the others. It also lacks the beauty and symmetry of the Ephesians Haustafel. Its basic thrust is that older women are to be an example to younger women, lest the latter fail to be faithful to their husbands and children and thereby bring reproach on the cause of the gospel.



1 Peter 3:1-7. As with Titus, this Haustafel lacks the full treatment of the three relationships of the household found in Colossians and Ephesians. It begins in chapter 2:13 with a general statement that Christians are to be subject to all human authorities (although the term authority is not explicitly present but is implied). This general statement is immediately applied in a specific way to the state. Christians are to be submissive to kings and governors. Then in verse 18, slaves are addressed. As in Titus 2, it is only slaves that are addressed. There is nothing to their masters.

In chapter 3, verses 1-7, wives and husbands are addressed, though the major focus of attention is clearly the wife. This advice to the wives is not the general advice that we find in Colossians and Ephesians, but has a strategic specificity in view that is similar to what we find in Titus. In Titus, however, this strategy is seen in negative terms. Christian women are not to cause the word of God to be blasphemed. In 1 Peter the focus is in positive terms and is even more specific. Christian wives are to behave in a way that will be a positive witness to their non-Christian husbands. Thus, it is a specific group that is in view--Christian wives with non-Christian husbands.

This advice to wives begins with the same command we have seen in all three previous Haustafeln. Wives are to be submissive to their own husbands. Immediately following the admonition, the specific purpose comes to view. This submission is so that non-Christians husbands may be won. Here Peter uses a

play on words. In fact, the word play is on the word "word." The goal is that these husbands who disobey in "word" will be won to Christianity without a "word." In other words, the goal is a Christian life lived as a witness. We have already seen<sup>77</sup> that Plutarch admonishes wives to maintain the religion of their husbands. Thus, the Christian wives that Peter addresses are already flying in the face of the cultural mores of the day by adopting a religion that is not their husbands. Peter hopes that they will not have to exacerbate that revolutionary stance by verbal witness to their husbands. Rather, he hopes that their inward beauty, lack of extravagance, and exemplary behavior will be a positive witness to the non-Christian husbands.

As he sets forth this goal, he refers to the example of the submissiveness of women in the past, particularly Sarah, who obeyed Abraham. This is the only place in the Haustafeln material that we have the word "obedience" applied to the wife's relationship to her husband. Sarah obeyed Abraham and called him Lord. This is obviously meant to be a positive example for the women that Peter addresses.

In verse 7, husbands are addressed. There is a sense in which this advice to husbands does not seem to follow logically from the advice to wives, for the advice to wives focuses specifically on those with non-Christian husbands. But obviously the general advice to wives would apply in a broader sense to those with Christian husbands, and now it is the Christian

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<sup>77</sup>See above, p. 21.

husbands who are in view. There is no admonition that they are to love their wives, but rather they are to live with their wives with understanding. They are also to assign honor to the feminine as the weaker body (the term "vessel" is used here and probably means "body".)

Hurley sees this term "weaker vessel" as a term of authority.<sup>60</sup> He holds that Peter is saying, "Remember that hers is a subordinate position and don't abuse your stronger position of authority." Hurley goes even further and maintains that this presents a hierarchical view of marriage that is grounded in issues that are not culturally relative. Thus, he applies this term to an authority-oriented, hierarchical relationship and comes to far-reaching conclusions. But the term "weakness" in the New Testament is not a term that has to do with authority relationships. Rather, it points to vulnerability. This can be physical vulnerability<sup>61</sup> or emotional and spiritual vulnerability.<sup>62</sup> Peter is probably saying that the greater physical strength of the male makes the female vulnerable to exploitation. Therefore, the husband is responsible for protecting his wife. Thus, this points not to the husband's authority but to his responsibility.

Peter ends the Haustafeln with an emphasis on spiritual mutuality. He reminds the husbands that their wives are fellow

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<sup>60</sup>Hurley, p. 156.

<sup>61</sup>See, for example, Matthew 8:17 and Luke 5:15.

<sup>62</sup>See, for example, 1 Corinthians 8:11-12.

heirs of the grace of life. Thus, there is a recognition that there is no spiritual distinction between husbands and wives. They are fellow-heirs of grace.

These four passages that we have studied are the only truly Haustafeln passages that include the husband-wife relationship.<sup>99</sup> Thus, our survey comes to a close. We must now move to our final task and ask about the significance of these passages in their original setting as well as their relevance for us.

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<sup>99</sup>There are two additional passages in the Pauline corpus that do not fall within the Haustafeln form but do speak of women being "submissive" (ὑποτάσσω). Both are sufficiently problematic that an entire paper of this size could be written on them. Both also appear to address specific problems and must be understood within a particular context. The first is 1 Corinthians 14:34 which admonishes that women are to be silent in church and submissive. Since just three chapters earlier Paul has already permitted women to pray and prophesy as long as they are veiled, this prohibition cannot be general or absolute. It should rather be understood within the context of the discussion on tongues in the chapter as a whole. Paul is forbidding a specific kind of speaking in church, i.e. ecstatic speech. This is the sense in which women are to be submissive. It is easy to understand that female participation in ecstatic speech could be interpreted wrongly by a society in which mystery cults flourished. A similar kind of cultural need may stand behind the other passage, 1 Timothy 2:11-15. Here women are instructed to learn in "submission" (ὑποτάγη) and not exercise authority over a man. Richard Longenecker, New Testament Social Ethics for Today (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984), p. 87, note 15, following classicist Katherine Kroeger, argues that at the time of Paul the verb "to exercise authority" connoted loose sexual behavior. Thus Paul is prohibiting Christian women from imitating the pagan female teachers who make it evident in the course of their lectures that they are available afterward for a second occupation. In neither of these passages is there any suggestion that women cannot participate in ministry. Had that been Paul's intention he could have said it much more clearly and in a context directed to issues of ministry rather than to the other specific situations addressed here.

Chapter 5 -- The Significance and Relevance  
of the Haustafeln Passages

We have already seen that it is impossible to trace the origin and evolution of the Haustafel form. This failure to trace the origin and evolution, however, does not detract from the fact that the New Testament material does participate in a broader cultural concern to address household relationships and especially the relationship of husband and wife. At the same time, however, there are unique emphases in the New Testament material.

When we look at the Haustafeln as a whole, with special attention to Colossians and Ephesians because of their more general nature, we find that there is a clear direction in the New Testament material. This direction moves toward increased mutuality between husband and wife. We review the following specifics. The New Testament material nowhere speaks of the inferiority of women or the superiority of men. It addresses women directly, giving them increased dignity as free moral agents. It places greater responsibility on the husband. There is none of the advice we find in Hellenistic Jewish material which admonishes husbands to keep their wives in line. Rather the husband's responsibility is always seen in positive terms. He is to love his wife. Finally, there is greater mutuality represented in the language of the admonitions. This reaches its most profound expression in Ephesians 5:21 where all are admonished to be mutually submissive to each other.



This mutual submission is not seen as good advice but is integral to one's commitment to Jesus Christ. Baptism into Christ leads to a new way of life--a life characterized by unity and fellowship in Jesus Christ. Each of these household relationships is transformed by that larger commitment. As Verhey has correctly stated,

The church could not create ex nihilo new role relationships for social structures; but it did not simply leave existing role relationships unmodified either. The reciprocity of responsibilities, the duty of mutual submission, the model of Christ, and the attention to the neighbor all work to transform the Stoic and Jewish codes.<sup>64</sup>

Only as we understand the New Testament Haustafeln against the backdrop of Jewish and Greco-Roman material do we see how strongly the direction moves toward mutuality. This direction of movement toward equality and fellowship is the most important normative principle that emerges from the New Testament Haustafeln.

Once the radical message of mutual submission, especially as seen in Ephesians 5:21 has been recognized, there can never again be any appeal to these passages to attempt to place more responsibility for "submission" on women than on men or to limit the function of women in the spiritual realm. Indeed, there can be no spiritual distinction, for both are fellow-heirs of grace (1 Peter 3:7). The principle of equality and mutuality is supreme.

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<sup>64</sup>Allen Verhey, The Great Reversal: Ethics and the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984), p. 69.

It is also clear, however, that there are other principles. In addition to mutual submission, there is concern that behavior within the marriage relationship not break the bounds of what is proper in a way that will bring disrepute upon the church. In other words, there is a principle of sensitivity to one's neighbor and concern for one's witness. Husbands and wives must keep their witness to the world and to each other in view.

What then is the relevance of this material for today? First of all, the New Testament Haustafeln would call into question any attitude toward marriage which gives the husband a domineering, hierarchical authority over his wife. There can be no privileged partner if we take the Haustafeln seriously, for privilege is always transformed into sacrificial service. On the other hand, the New Testament Haustafeln also call into question any kind of feminist position that would detract from the wife's commitment to husband and children, or that would denigrate the sanctity of those relationships. There is a kind of feminism that would lead to independence and isolation rather than mutuality, and the Haustafeln call this into question as well. We cannot expect the Haustafeln to spell out the specific roles of husband and wife in the 20th century. They do not even do that for the first century, but they do call on all marital relationships to be governed by a spirit of mutual responsibility.

Thus far, we have spoken only of the husband-wife relationship. What is the relevance of these passages, however,

for the broader question of the role of women in the church and in the ordained ministry?

We should first notice that there is nothing in this material that speaks directly to the question of women in ministry or the ordination of women. That means that nothing in this material would forbid ordination to women.

It is true that some claim that it is inconsistent for wives to be submissive to their husbands and at the same time serve as ministers or be ordained to the ministry. But the Hauustafeln material should show us clearly that submission does not in any way rule out one's role as minister. That is clear from the various submissions that are required in this material. For example, slaves are to be submissive to their masters. Does this mean that no slave could serve as a minister? One of the marvels of early Christianity was that when Christians came together in a house church such distinctions disappeared. Certainly they would have disappeared when it came to choosing officers. Could the early church have been faithful to the gospel if it had elected only masters and not slaves to serve in various ministries within the church? Further, all Christians are called upon to be submissive to kings and governors. Does this submission to kings and governors rule out their participation in ministry? Of course not. The fact that wives are to be submissive speaks to a special relationship and in no way denies ministry to them. Although it is outside the specific assignment of this paper, we should note the importance of female co-workers in Paul's

ministry.<sup>23</sup> And, of course, the fact that submission does not exclude ministry becomes even clearer when we understand the mutual submission of Ephesians 5:21, for here we see that all are to be submissive to each other.

If we are called upon to move in the direction that the New Testament points us, then this material calls upon us to ask if we are moving as we should be in the direction of mutuality and equality. Could it be that the time has come (at least in our American culture) that our failure to include women in full participation in the ministry blasphemes the word of God by pointing out the gap between the reality of our practice and the ideal of mutuality and equality in Christ? In other words, the principle of sensitivity to the neighbor, which motivated Paul and Peter (Titus 2 and 1 Peter 3) to add certain qualifications to equality, would now seem to point in another direction. By our failure to ordain women the Gospel is discredited, for we are not doing all that we can, within our cultural context, to move in the direction of mutuality and equality to which the New Testament calls us.

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<sup>23</sup>See, for example, the names of Phoebe, Priscilla, Tryphena, Tryphosa, Persis, etc. in Romans 16.