

**THE ROLE OF HUSBAND AND WIVES IN PAULINE *HAUSTANFELN*
(HOUSEHOLD CODES)**

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Abstract

The paper focused on the role of a Christian couple in Pauline *Haustafeln* as contained in Ephesians and Colossian passages. In the Greco-Roman world of the Testament, there were ethical codes guiding the roles of individuals both at home and in larger society. Paul being abreast with these seemed to have adopted and developed these regulations to suit the Christian situation. The thrust of this paper therefore, is to elucidate these household tables which Paul set out for his converts in Ephesus and Colossae, highlighting the challenging responsibilities involved for the Christian couple and intends to serve as a recipe to contemporary married partners confronted with marital problems and difficulty in rearing up well-cultured children. The paper exposed the functions, interplay and limits of each partner in terms of the husband's headship and the wife's submissiveness. It related the role of wives to its effects on the full participation and partnership of woman in the home, church and society. The paper recommends that the present church should emphasize the duties of sexual partners in Christian homes for the purpose of the propagation of the Gospel and that they should be established in direct harmony with the principles of the Pauline *Haustafeln*.

Key Words: Roles, Husband, Wives, Pauline, *Haustanfeln*

Introduction

The **Haustafeln** (household tables) are ethical codes governing the relationship of individuals in the society. They describe the duties and responsibilities of the average person in his relationships at home and the world. In the Pauline corpus, they were instructions that took the form of catechism dealing with various relationships: government, slavery, marriage and family. Martin Luther in his "Catechism" appears to have been the first person to refer to these lists as "**Haustafeln**" meaning "house tables" but it is often translated "tables of household

duties” (Scott, 1979). This concept was most probably borrowed from the Hellenistic synagogue which had been the ethical teaching of Hellenistic philosophies, and if Paul was conscious of deriving any information from Jewish or Greek sources, then there is no doubt that he thoroughly Christianized what he borrowed. There is no better example of this **Haustafeln** than Paul’s instruction to husbands and wives in Ephesians and Colossians which is based upon a developed doctrine of the Christ and his church (Kee & Young, 1974).

The purpose of this study is to elucidate Pauline teaching on the household tables/management, which breaks down and expounds the domestic roles of the Christian husband and wife. It is meant to create the awareness of the challenging responsibilities of a Christian couple in the family. It also thoroughly explains the interplay of the “authority” versus “submission” of a Christian couple, that is, what is involved in this mutual relationship and harmonious union between the husband and wife. The study is instructive: it is intended to help contemporary married sexual partners, especially to those ones that are plague with marital problems and difficulty of rearing up well-cultured children.

The Duty of the Woman to her Husband (Ephesians 5:21-33)

Paul, though unmarried, addressed the woman on her role to the making of a good Christian home. As a duty, she is to be submissive to her husband as head of the home. The apostle begins his ethical in junctions with the wife: does that imply that most problems of the family arise from the women? Requirement for the Christian wife “be submissive” to her husband is in no sense a peculiar phenomenon to the Christian community. Both Jewish and Gentile teachers conceived the ideal wife as faithful and obedient but this ideal was rare in the Greco-Roman world. It has been attested that even “wives of emperors” and other well-known Roman figures were unfaithful, yet there were also good ones. Some of the most moving epitaphs obtained from the period revealed of husbands showering praises on their wives for faithfulness, evidence depicting their rarity (Kee & Young, 1974).

Two reasons are deduced for the wife’s required submission. First, it is drawn from creation (man was made first) and concerns the husband’s “headship” of his wife, while the second is on redemption and concerns Christ’s headship of the church. Now does this submission include things that are wrong and criminal? It is not Colossians 3:18 answer the question: “...unto the Lord”. It is a submission based on “the fear of the Lord” (Ephesians 5:21).

A lot of sentiments have arisen from this injunction on woman’s submission to their husbands. It appears that some viewed it as the very essence of retrogression in a civilized social relationship. Some opposed the notion as outdated because it has given men the impetus to perpetuate some forms of inhuman traits such as humiliation, and oppression on their female counterpart. Although, we may concur that woman in many societies past and present have been dehumanized but the household tables or codes must be set precisely in the framework of

Pauline thought wherein the apostle was describing the new society of humanity which God has inaugurated through Christ (Kee & Young, 1974).

Again, the wife's submission has to be interpreted first and foremost in a peculiarly Christian perspective. The injunction implies that the wives being addressed were married to non-Christian husbands. They were expected to live up to the ideal of a good wife so that they might through their faith win their husbands to Christ "without a word." According to Plutarch, the Hellenistic philosopher (AD 20-50), the ideal wife should accept her husband's religion. But is it not equally wrong for the Christian wife to renounce her religion. This would be contrary to the will of God apostasy. It seemed Paul was aware of this conduct not peculiarly Christian but he had to transform it to suit the Christian situation.

When we recall how Christianity was despised in the Roman Empire we can imagine the fragile peace there must have been in homes where Christian wives shown acts of insubordination to their non-Christian husbands. The reason for Paul's instruction becomes obviously more meaningful. The Christian wife was to maintain the ideal of good wife giving a loving relationship so that her husband might be converted. To St Paul, the ultimate goal of the wife is not to satisfy the existing culture but to do what is right in the sight of God (Eph. 2:6). Often, the word "submission" (hypotage) is interpreted as if were a synonym for subjugation, subservience or humiliation. But this is not exactly the same in this context (Scott, 1979).

There is nothing humiliating about it. The submission is not a thoughtless blind obedience to the husband rather an appreciative gesture to his care. Paul's metaphor clarifies the meaning. "As the church is subject to Christ, so let wives also be subject everything to their husband" (Eph. 5:24). This submission is a free response and not coerced. It is not a forced action, but a voluntary one. It is a humble lying down of self to the husband after the model of the church. According to Markus Barth (1974):

The submission to and respect for the husband, to which the wife is specially admonished is by no means the submissiveness of a pussycat or a crouching dog... Paul... is thinking of a voluntary, free, joyful and thankful partnership, as the analogy of the relationship of the church to Christ shows (p.223).

Therefore, the woman's submission is a free response and not forced on her it is the self-sacrificing surrender, unconditional love of a compassionate and committed spouse.

Often, Paul's statement has been criticized to be too brief. Does it include the area of domestic duties at home, disbursement of funds, spending time in routine work at church or even choice of food? To this the apostle, answered in Ephesians 5:24... everything provided her conduct to the husband is not contrary to God's will and good reasoning.

The Duty of the Husband (Ephesians 5:25-33 & Col 3: 19)

The first duty is that the husband should love his wife with strong sacrificial “*agape*” such as demonstrated by Christ for his bride the church and not with weak love. Paul employs five verbs to indicate the unfolding depth of Christ’s commitment to his church. He loved her *egapesen*, gave himself up *paredoken* her, that he might sanctify *agiase* her, having cleansed *katharis* that he might present *parastese* her to him in full splendor and without any spot or blemish. The completeness and comprehensiveness had made some scholars think that it may be a quotation from a Christian confession liturgy or hymn.

In Pauline analogy there is a deliberate allusion to the bridal bath which takes place before the Jewish and Greek weddings- the washing with water of the church (woman/bride) preceded her consecration (ablution). Having done that, the bridegroom (Christ/husband) sanctifies her (that is, the process of making her holy in conduct) and finally presents her to himself in splendor (endoxon). The **endoxon**, conveys the meaning of the bride’s beautiful wedding dress (Scott, 1979).

Thus, in Pauline thought, the bride (wife/church) does not make herself presentable; it is the bridegroom (Christ/husband) who labours to beautify her for himself. In other words, in the Christian family, the husband does not use his headship or leadership to crush the wife rather it is he, who sacrifices himself through his “nourishing and “cherishing” to develop the wife’s potential in order to become what God intended her to be.

Comparably, there is a close relationship in the *Hausafeln* of Pauline thought with both the Jewish and Greco-Roman environments. Marriage was patriarchal and a male dominated system. The **pater familias** or male ruled unit was taken to represent the appropriate ordering of the household. It was generally accepted that wives, children and slaves should submit fully to the leadership of the husband-father-master.

E.A Judge (1960) summarizes cynically “what we hear in the *Hustafeln* is “the voice of the propertied class.” But it is pertinent to point out that the Pauline household (oikos) though hierarchical with the husband as head or so to say the chairman, the headship does not signal superiority but a functional selfless sacrificial one. It rules out the inferiority and low view of woman of the Jews and the male domination of the Greeks. The ideology of male supremacy is not only implied but the headship of the husband as in the view of Ryrie is to be exercised through the filter of Christian *agape* love. Here is an authority defined in terms of loving responsibility.

The Duty of parents to children (Ephesians 6:4 & Colossians 3:2)

The most striking feature of Pauline *Haustafeln* is that in each pair of relationships, reciprocal duties are laid down. So, while children are mandated to submit to parental authority, Paul urges the reciprocal responsibility of parents towards their children, that is, to reciprocate their good conduct.

It is pertinent to note that the instruction to parents in Ephesians 6:4 reads “fathers, do not provoke your children to anger but bring them in the discipline and instruction of the Lord” and in Colossians 3:21, “... lest they be discouraged”. Greek word ‘*patere*’ meaning father can be used for ‘father and mothers’ just as “*adelphoi*” used to mean ‘brothers’ meant ‘brothers and sisters’. Thus, it is both father and mother who are referred to in the two passages above. Remarkably, there are some parental attitudes which provoke resentment and anger in children; they are arbitrary and unkind disciplines, which instead of helping children to develop their potentiality often lead to discouragement. The child’s personality must be respected and on no account to be exploited, manipulated or crushed; that of course would be child abuse. On this kind of misuse of authority, Sir Fredrick Catherwood (1979) comments:

The dominant father, of the Victorian novels who used his own authority for his own ends, is no more entitled to claim Christian authority than the rebellious son. One is abusing authority, the other is flouting it. Both are wrong (p.262).

Scott (1979) emphasizes very strongly:

Not all the non-conforming responses of womanhood deserve to be styled “rebellion”. On the contrary, it is by experiment that children discover both the limits of their liberty and the quality of their parental love. Moreover, in order to grow up, they have to develop their interdependence not because they are resistant to parental authority, but because they need to exercise their own (p.247).

The type of parents described in Pauline ***Haustafeln*** as self-controlled, gentle and who “***eketrepho***” (which means literally to “nourish” or “feed” their children as patient educators do to their pupils) are in a stark contrast to the norm of Paul’s own day. At the head of the Roman “**pater families**” or male-dominated unit, the father exercises absolute authority over all members of the family. According to Barclays (1954:208), “A Roman father...could sell them as slaves; he could make them work in his fields even in chains, he could take the law into his own hands and punish as he liked, he could even inflict the death penalty on his child”. This means that the father in the Roman society had the absolute authority, the right to life and death over all members of his family.

But in the Christian family, this is completely different; the Christian father who derived his fatherhood from the “one God and Father of us all” (Eph. 1:14-15; 4:6) is to care and demonstrate love for his children, and this applies to mothers as well. Parents are to be careful that they do not misuse their authority on children or make irritating or unreasonable demands which gives no room for children’s inexperience and immaturity. They are expected to eschew hardness and cruelty at one extreme and favoritism and over indulgence on the other (Scott, 1979). While there is a place for discipline in the Christian family, it must never be

arbitrary or borne out of hostility, for what would lead to discouragement on the part of children.

It should be bore in mind that it is the parental duty to help their children develop their full potentials. They should recognize that they have a life and personality of their own; they are people of their own right and as such they are to be respected, and on no account be exploited, manipulated or crushed. It is also for the purpose of right discipline that Lloyd—Jones (1974) remarks with practical wisdom:

When you are discipline a child, you should have first controlled yourself...What right has you to say to your child that he needs discipline when you obviously needs it yourself” Self-control, the control of temper, is an essential prerequisite in the control of others (p.268).

The Old Testament is clear and precise on the issue of discipline and punishment on disobedient children. Proverbs 13:24 says “He who spares the rod spoils his son, but who loves him is diligent to discipline him”. Again in Proverbs 22:15, it says “folly is bound in the heart of a child but the rod of discipline derives it far from him”. While the Victorian and cruel fathers used these verses from Proverbs to justify their excessively stern discipline, on the one hand, our generation has witnessed an over-reaction resulting in excessively laissez-faire permissiveness on the other hand.

So far, we have been talking principally about disciplining of children. But the Christian upbringing of children is not only mental but also moral and physical, that is, in terms of welfare. On the moral aspect, it includes instruction. One popularly contemporary opinion is to urge parents to be totally non-directive and leave their children to find their own way. The scriptures, of course, have a different mind-set. Indeed, some parents are too directive, too domineering, and thereby inhibit their children from learning to make their personal decisions and so grow into maturity. Right education, on the part of parents and teachers, involves guidance and stimulation in which to act as catalyst, and to encourage them to make their own responses. This is contrary to false education, in which parents and teachers impose their mind and will on children.

On the aspect of welfare, parents are to provide for their children’s need. The scripture says “a man who cannot feed his family is worse than an infidel”, which implies that fathers (mothers inclusive) should care for their children’s housing, feeding, clothing, school fees, medical bills and so on.

Alternative and Literalist Interpretation of Wives’ Submissiveness and Husbands’ Headship

Taking along with other New Testament passages (e.g. I Peter 2:18-3:7), the effect of Pauline *Haustafeln* enjoining the “submission” of wives and the “headship” of the husband has

been interpreted to mean that Christianity has profoundly encouraged the marginalization, subjugation, and exploitation in Western and non-Western cultures. Here, the idea of female's "inner equality" with males was –and is- viewed as compatible with women's hierarchical subordination, marginalization and inequitable treatment in the domestic, ecclesiastical and socio-political spheres. Pauline ethics found in the household codes is seen as promulgating those characteristics in women that have often rendered them passive, acquiescent, dependent and infantile (Martin, 1991).

This limits consciously or unconsciously women's full participation and partnership in home, church and society. It inhibits the female efforts to ensure the more equitable distribution of resources and power in governmental and non-governmental institutions; it discourages efforts to redefine and nurture more balanced and positive cultural image and roles of women. These facts are evident, for example, in the domestic, ecclesiastical and socio-political horizons of the Nigerian society. The present inclusion of the appointment of women in the three tiers democratic government of Nigeria and an agitation in the House of Assembly to apportion political seats to women to the tune of 30% in the highest political offices, for example, is a right step toward correcting the imbalance.

What does "headship" (*kephale*) mean? Some traditionalist interpreters argue that the term is synonymous with authority (*exousia*), while others reject the interpretation in authority structure and that any imposition on what is meant to be a relationship marked by reciprocity should be a distortion of the Christology paradigms adduced in the passage the head-relationship between Christ and the Church for understanding the husband- wife in marriage.

What is the meaning of "to be subject" (*hypotaso*)? Again, traditionalist interpreters argue that the term is synonymous with subordination and domination of wives as supportive players in the "essentiality male drama" with female nature as relative to the "normative" male nature, and secondary to that of male. A survey of the contemporary biblical interpretation of the *Hauستافeln* regulation of wives' submission to husbands confirms that the injunction continues to be utilized to legitimate a hierarchical, subordinate ethos in the domestic, ecclesiastical and societal life. For example, Charles C Ryrie (1958) contends that the wife's subordination to her husband is not an interim ethic, but constitutes an interminable norm, meant for all times. He argues:

In domestic relationships then God has appointed an order which includes the husband as the head and the wife in a place of honour through a place of subordination of the wife in domestic relations as normal and fixed status (pp.65-66)

In the opinion of Fritz Zerbst (1955 p.781), "the code prescribes the "divine arrangement" for husband-wife relations. While men are not instructed to "subject" wives to themselves, or that they should exercise power over them, it is obvious that subjection on the part of the wife remains". Zerbst further argues that since the teaching and preaching of the Gospel involve, in some sense, "rule-over" others, women ordination especially is prohibited as a violation of women's subjection.

Igenoza (2003) is of a strong opinion that when the wife is exhorted to submit herself to the authority of her husband, it is not because she is an inferior being as Bible commentators such as Jewett and Mollenkott think. These two critics held the view that since a woman must of necessity be subordinate, she must of necessity be inferior- an idea derived from the Rabbinic circles. But as Hurley (1981) rightly points out, the husband's role is a matter of divine appointment rather than as a consequence of either the sociological or psychological assumptions. However, Igenoza (2003) submits that the subordination is entirely situational *hos to kurio*, that is, "unto the Lord".

Conclusion

In the light of the above interpretations, it is quite understandable why the *Haustafeln* regulation enjoining wives' submission to their husbands is used to reinforce patterns of domination of women in church and society. In Nigeria today as in other parts of the world, the struggle for the ordination of women as clergy in the established churches (e.g The Anglican, Baptist and Church Missionary Society (CMS)) has always met with frustration and disappointment. Fortunately, it is the Pentecostal and non-Pentecostal churches that have redeemed the women folks from perpetual domination, subjugation, marginalization and trivialization to full participation and partnership in home, church and society. Thus, they have resorted to certain extent the true nature and fundamental integrity of humanity in women. It is hoped that with time, the established or mainline churches in Nigeria will change their perception and give the *Haustafeln* a more hermeneutic consideration until the full personal and social implications of the eschatological reality of Paul's teaching in Galatians 3:28-29 (in Christ there is...no male or female) are established and practiced in our churches.

In Pauline *Haustafeln*, the apostle outlined the new standards which God expects of husbands and wives especially in terms of a godly and peaceful life in order to raise responsible children. This concerns the practical down-to-earth relationship in the home. What is the relevance of the divine family to those in the church- if its human families cannot display God's love? What is the point of peace in the Church if there is no peace in the home? Too many persons have over-emphasized "holiness teaching" of a personal relationship with Christ to the neglect and its consequences in terms of relationship with our acquaintances. Thus in Nigeria, our churches should be concerned with the duties of the sexual partners in a Christian home, which is of paramount importance to the propagation of the Gospel.

While one must recognize that several factors go into play for a successful married life, the cordial and understandable relationship between married couples is indispensable. Of the many factors which tend to weld a home into an invincible unit, the effective roles of the husband and his wife are perhaps the most potent. When a husband and his wife establish their home in direct harmony with the principles of the *Haustafeln* as expounded in this study, and rear their children accordingly, the chances of this home manifesting the most noble ideals of the Gospel becomes extremely high. The problem of divorce plaguing many couples ceases to exist and their impact upon the church and society remarkable.

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