

A RADICALLY NEW HUMANITY: THE FUNCTION OF THE *HAUSTAFEL* IN EPHESIANS

TIMOTHY G. GOMBIS*

I. INTRODUCTION

While biblical scholars have typically treated the *Haustafel* in Ephesians as a resource in the debate over the role of women in ministry and in the home, the function of this passage in the argument of Ephesians has received far less attention.¹ Most scholars regard the *Haustafel* to have an apologetic thrust in Ephesians, viewing it as an attempt to shield the new Christian movement from the suspicion that it might undermine contemporary social structures and ultimately threaten the stability of the Roman empire.² Its appearance, on such a view, reflects Paul's "sensitivity to wider social expectations," and his aim is to pacify the fears of those who suspected the Christians of being a subversive movement.³ This would have been especially important in regard to the Roman empire, which valued duty and order and was "suspicious of any potential threats to [its] social order."⁴ Craig Keener claims that "[g]roups accused of undermining the moral fabric of Roman society thus sometimes protested that they instead conformed to traditional Roman values, by producing their own lists, or 'Household Codes' fitting those normally used in their day."⁵

David Balch argues for such a view, with reference to 1 Pet 2:13–3:9, based on the strategy of both Philo and Josephus when facing the accusations that Jewish proselytism was ruining the social fabric of Roman society. Pointing to the stability of the typical Jewish home, Philo writes,

Wives must be in servitude to their husbands, a servitude not imposed by violent ill-treatment but promoting obedience in all things. Parents must have power over their children. . . . The same holds for any other persons over whom he [a man] has authority . . . (*Hypothetica* 7.3, 5).⁶

* Timothy Gombis is assistant professor of Bible, Cedarville University, 251 N. Main St., Cedarville, OH 45314.

¹ The German term *Haustafel* ("house table") was first used by Martin Luther and is a common convention used with reference to the household codes in the NT.

² John Muddiman, *The Epistle to the Ephesians* (BNTC; Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2004) 278; Andrew T. Lincoln, *Ephesians* (WBC 42; Dallas: Word, 1990) 397; cf. also Margaret Y. MacDonald, *The Pauline Churches: A Socio-historical Study of Institutionalization in the Pauline and Deutero-Pauline Writings* (SNTSMS 60; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988) 109.

³ P. H. Towner, "Households and Household Codes," *DNTB* 419.

⁴ Craig Keener, "Family and Household," *DNTB* 587.

⁵ Craig Keener, *Paul, Women and Wives: Marriage and Women's Ministry in the Letters of Paul* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1992) 145–46.

⁶ David L. Balch, *Let Wives Be Submissive: The Domestic Code in 1 Peter* (SBLMS 26; Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1981) 54.

According to Balch, Josephus writes with a similar purpose:

The woman, says the 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 (*Ag. Ap.* II.199).⁷

Margaret MacDonald argues that the *Haustafel* appears in Ephesians with the same goal, aimed at “reducing the tension between community members and outsiders.”⁸ This reading usually regards the letter as coming from the post-apostolic period when attitudes toward the participation of women in the churches hardened and there was a backlash against early Pauline egalitarian ideals. According to Franz Mußner, “Man muß also die Haustafelethik auch aus der geschichtlichen Entwicklung der Urkirche heraus verstehen, wobei nun freilich der von Paulus in Gal 3,28 aufgestellte Grundsatz . . . im christlichen ‘Haus’ so nicht realisiert wurde, wie er in seiner Idealität klingt.”⁹

Such a reading, however, is less convincing than it initially appears, as there is little evidence within Ephesians that an apologetic thrust is present. One searches in vain for any indication that Paul is trying to justify Christian communities against the suspicions of Rome. Ephesians is concerned mainly with the internal life of new creation communities rather than with relationships with outsiders. After his harsh critique of pagan culture throughout the present section of the letter, it is hardly credible to claim that Paul is attempting to find common ground between Christian communities and the surrounding culture. Far from minimizing the differences between what he calls the Old Humanity (Eph 4:22) and the New Humanity (Eph 2:15; 4:24), Paul is stressing the absolute incompatibility of the two spheres.¹⁰

Further, it is inappropriate to claim that because household codes were utilized by some ancient writers in an apologetic context, such a form must necessarily have this purpose in every context in which it appears. While this seems fairly obvious, the assumption that the *Haustafel* has an apologetic purpose in Ephesians is based on little evidence beyond this connection. According to John Elliott, there is “a tendency to treat all the New Testament household codes *en bloc* rather than to inquire concerning a specific

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ MacDonald, *The Pauline Churches* 109.

⁹ [“One must understand the ethics of the house-table from the perspective of the historical development of the early church, whereby the principle laid out by Paul in Gal 3:28 . . . was not realized according to its ideal in the Christian home.”] Franz Mußner, *Der Brief an die Epheser* (ÖTK NT 10; Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 1982) 153.

¹⁰ The New Humanity and Old Humanity are not to be understood as two natures that co-exist within individuals, but rather as two cosmic realms. They are best understood against a Jewish apocalyptic world view, an essential part of which was a temporal dualism (4 *Ezra* 7:50; 2 *Bar.* 51.8–10) (Edward Adams, *Constructing the World: A Study in Paul's Cosmological Language* [SNTW; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 2000] 109; J. J. Collins, *Seers, Sybils and Sages in Hellenistic-Roman Judaism* [JSJSup 54; Leiden: Brill, 1997] 84–91; N. A. Dahl, *Studies in Ephesians: Introductory Questions, Text- & Edition-Critical Issues, Interpretation of Texts and Themes* [ed. D. Hellholm, V. Blomkvist, and T. Fornberg; WUNT 131; Tübingen: Mohr-Siebeck, 2000] 397). In the thought world of Ephesians, the eschatological new age has dawned with the death and resurrection of Christ (1:20–23) so that it exists in the midst of the old creation ruled by the evil powers. The terms Paul uses for these two spheres are the “New Humanity” (τὸν καινὸν ἄνθρωπον, 4:24) and the “Old Humanity” (τὸν παλαιὸν ἄνθρωπον, 4:22).

function of a code within a specific document.”¹¹ In our investigation the most important factor in determining the purpose for which Paul used this convention is the literary context in which it appears.

II. A MANIFESTO FOR THE NEW HUMANITY (EPH 5:22–6:9)

I will argue that Paul, via the *Haustafel*, is laying out a manifesto for the New Humanity, painting in broad strokes a vision for how believers ought to conduct themselves in new creation communities, thus epitomizing the triumph of God in Christ. In Ephesians, Paul proclaims the triumph of God in Christ over the powers and authorities that rule the present evil age (Eph 1:20–23).¹² The cosmic supremacy of Christ is evident from his victories over the evil powers. These powers formerly had held people captive in death through transgressions and sins (Eph 2:2), but God in Christ has freed believers from their grip, giving them life, raising them, and seating them with Christ in the heavenlies (Eph 2:5–6). Humanity had been divided by the Law, and such divisions were exacerbated by the destructive work of the powers (Eph 2:11–12). But in his death, Christ has created the New Humanity made up of believers from any and every race and nation (Eph 2:13–16). Because of his victory in achieving peace (Eph 2:17), Christ has the right to build his temple, which stands as a lasting monument to his triumph (Eph 2:20–22).¹³ His temple consists of the people of God, the Church, the place where God in Christ dwells by his Spirit.

¹¹ John H. Elliott, *A Home for the Homeless: A Sociological Exegesis of 1 Peter, Its Situation and Strategy* (London: SCM, 1981) 208. While scholars are generally more confident that the *Haustafel* in 1 Peter has an apologetic thrust vis-à-vis the *Haustafel* in Ephesians, Elliott challenges this notion, arguing that such a view is myopic and does not properly consider the literary and theological features of 1 Peter (pp. 165–232).

¹² The powers ruling the present evil age fulfill a God-given role in creation. They were created to be the mediators of God’s rule over this world. According to Jewish thought, the nation of Israel was deemed to be the special inheritance of the God of Israel, but he appointed gods to rule over the nations (Deut 32:8–9; Sir 17:17) (Bruce W. Longenecker, *The Triumph of Abraham’s God: The Transformation of Identity in Galatians* [Louisville: Abingdon, 1998] 51). They were given a stewardship to rule the nations and order their corporate life in such a way that the nations would fear the Most High God. However, these gods have rebelled against their God-given stewardship so that their rule is characterized by a perversion of their original commission. Instead of being faithful stewards of God’s rule, they have corrupted their cultures and have ordered their nations in such a way that those in positions of authority now exploit the weak and powerless, grasping after power and seeking to take any advantage they can in order to satisfy their own lusts for more power, prestige, possessions, and sensual gratification (Ps 82:1–8; *Jub.* 15:31). What is important in this tradition is that the cultures and nations under the rule of these powers have come to resemble the powers themselves, along with their selfish and self-destructive behavior. Ephesians reflects this tradition in that the character of the Old Humanity is oriented according to that of its rulers. Just as the powers have incurred the judgment of God because they have become graspers after the cosmos (Eph 6:12) instead of faithful stewards of the rule of God (Longenecker, *Triumph* 54), so the Old Humanity is characterized by the sins mentioned in the two triads in Eph 4:19 and 5:3. Those in the Old Humanity have been led astray into idolatry (Eph 5:5), having their lives ordered by the evil powers and reflecting their own selfish and self-destructive character.

¹³ On Paul’s utilization of divine warfare ideology in making this argument, see Timothy G. Gombis, “Ephesians 2 as a Narrative of Divine Warfare,” *JSNT* 26 (2004) 403–18.

According to Paul, the Church participates in and epitomizes the triumph of God in Christ by effectively actualizing its identity as the New Humanity by the power of the Spirit in the midst of the enemy territory that is the present evil age ruled by the rebellious powers. Following on from Eph 5:18–21, he gives a comprehensive view of what relationships ought to look like in the New Humanity. The *Haustafel*, therefore, is a manifesto for the new creation people of God and does not merely have the modern notion of the nuclear family in view, though certainly it includes this. As Elliott states, the *Haustafel* functions to “concretize the communal implications of the early Christian proclamation of salvation.”¹⁴ Paul’s instruction for how the New Humanity is to operate is not given in abstraction from mundane life, but rather is given in the form of discussing the relationships within the household, just as ancient political philosophers utilized this form with a similar purpose.¹⁵

When ancient political theorists addressed the proper ordering of the *politeia*, they wrote about the ordering of the household, utilizing a form similar to the *Haustafel* found in Ephesians—the *oikonomia* tradition.¹⁶ As Elliott states, the household constituted “a chief basis, paradigm, and reference point for religious and moral as well as social, political, and economic organization, interaction, and ideology.”¹⁷ In his work, *Politics*, written about 335 BC, Aristotle writes:

Now that it is clear what are the component parts of the state, we have first of all to discuss household management (*οἰκονομία*); for every state is composed of households (*ἐξ οἰκιῶν*). Household management falls into departments corresponding to the parts of which the household in its turn is composed; and the household in its perfect form consists of slaves and freemen. 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 each of these three relationships, I mean that of mastership, that of marriage . . . , and thirdly the progenerative relationship (*Pol.* I 1253b 1–14).

In a further passage, he again relates the household to the state:

¹⁴ Elliott, *A Home for the Homeless* 219.

¹⁵ Annemarie Mayer, *Sprache der Einheit im Epheserbrief und in der Ökumene* (WUNT 2/150; Tübingen: Mohr-Siebeck, 2002) 177. The “household” in the ancient world included more than the nuclear family, and was more like a modern plantation or family business, even, as Andrew Wallace-Hadrill suggests, something like a neighborhood (“*Domus* and *Insulae* in Rome: Families and Households,” in *Early Christian Families in Context: An Interdisciplinary Dialogue* [ed. D. L. Balch and C. Osiek; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003] 3–18). It included extended family, employees, slaves and possibly their families (B. Thurston, *Reading Colossians, Ephesians, and 2 Thessalonians: A Literary and Theological Commentary* [New York: Crossroads, 1995] 138–39; Dale B. Martin, “Slave Families and Slaves in Families,” in *Early Christian Families in Context* 207–30).

¹⁶ Elliott, *A Home for the Homeless* 214; Dieter Lührmann, “Wo man nicht mehr Sklave oder Freier ist. Überlegungen zur Struktur frühchristlicher Gemeinden,” *WD* 13 (1975) 79; *idem*, “Neutestamentliche Haustafeln und antike Ökonomie,” *NTS* 27 (1980) 83–97; Balch, *Let Wives Be Submissive* 34, 109.

¹⁷ Elliott, *A Home for the Homeless* 213.

. . . [E]very household is part of a state, and these relationships are part of the household, and the excellence of the part must have regard to that of the whole (*Pol.* I 1260b 12).

Balch cites this passage from Areius Didymus (70–10 BC), making a similar connection:

Having sufficiently defined “virtues” and, more or less, the many crowded headings of the *topos* on “ethics,” it is necessary successively to go through in detail both “household management” and “politics,” since the human being is by nature a political animal. A primary kind of association (*politeia*) is the legal union of a man and a woman for the begetting of children and for sharing life. This is called a household and is the source for a city, concerning which it is also necessary to speak. For the household is like any small city, if, at least as is intended, the marriage flourishes, and the children mature and are paired with one another; another household is founded, and thus a third and a fourth, and out of these, a village and a city. After many villages come to be, a city is produced. So just as the household yields for the city the seeds of its formation, thus also it yields the constitution (*politeia*). Connected with the house is a pattern of monarchy, of aristocracy and of democracy. The relationship of parents to children is monarchic, of husbands to wives aristocratic, of children to one another democratic (*Epitome* II.147,26–148,16).¹⁸

In addition, instances of the *oikonomia* tradition addressed the three relationships of husband/wife, parent/child, and master/slave, because these relationships within the household typified, or were models of, the kinds of relationships found in the *politeia*.¹⁹ In *Nichomachean Ethics*, Aristotle notes that,

One may find likenesses and so to speak models of these various forms of a constitution in the household. The relationship of father to sons is regal in type, since a father’s first care is for his children’s welfare. This is why Homer styles Zeus “father,” for the ideal of kingship is paternal government. Among the Persians paternal rule is tyrannical, for the Persians use their sons as slaves. The relation of master to slaves is also tyrannic, since in it the master’s interest is aimed at. The autocracy of a master appears to be right, that of the Persian father is wrong; for different subjects should be under different forms of rule. The relationship of husband to wife seems to be in the nature of an aristocracy: the husband rules in virtue of fitness, and in matters that belong to a man’s sphere; matters suited to a woman he hands over to his wife. When the husband controls everything, he transforms the relationship into an oligarchy, for he governs in violation of fitness, and not in virtue of superiority. And sometimes when the wife is an heiress, it is she who rules. In these cases then authority goes not by virtue but by wealth and power, as in an oligarchy. . . . Democracy appears most fully in households without a master, for in them all the members are equal; but it also prevails where the ruler of the house is weak, and everyone is allowed to do what he likes. Under each of these forms of government we find friendship existing between ruler and ruled, to the same extent as justice (*Eth. nic.* VIII 1160b 23–1161a 10).²⁰

¹⁸ Balch, *Let Wives Be Submissive* 41.

¹⁹ *Ibid.* 34–35.

²⁰ *Ibid.* 35.

These examples are only a few of many that could be cited demonstrating “the antiquity, continuity and universality of the association between the subject matter ‘concerning the *politeia*’ and that concerning ‘household management’ (*oikonomia*).”²¹ This close connection between the *oikonomia* tradition and political ethics indicates that Eph 5:22–6:9 is designed to function more broadly than merely giving instruction for Christian nuclear families. Paul is, rather, making a “latent political claim,” and his discussion is a critique of conventional societal conditions.²² The *Haustafel* in Ephesians, then, presents a comprehensive vision of the eschatological New Humanity—the new creation *politeia*—realized under the conditions of this present fallen age.²³ It is a manifesto for a radically new society. Because the household was a microcosm of the entire believing community, it provides a concrete model for how Paul’s readers can carry out the command in Eph 5:18–21 to be “the household of God” (οἰκεῖοι τοῦ θεοῦ, Eph 2:19).²⁴

This vision of the New Humanity is elaborated against the chaotic, destructive, and divisive social patterns created and fostered by the evil powers, who have perverted the created order in such a way that has affected every aspect and level of society. Those in positions of power manipulate, dominate, and exploit those who are weaker in order to increase in social status and honor.²⁵ Those who have less social leverage are tempted to rebel against such oppressive authority structures, or to develop (self-)destructive strategies for survival. The condition of the Old Humanity is a product and reflection of the

²¹ Elliott, *A Home for the Homeless* 214.

²² Ibid. 219; Lührmann, “Wo man nicht mehr Sklave oder Freier ist” 79–80.

²³ Lührmann, “Wo man nicht mehr Sklave oder Freier ist” 70–71.

²⁴ Elliott, *A Home for the Homeless* 219. Cf. also Andreas Lindemann: “Die christliche Gemeinde stellte sich dar als ein Modell für den Staat bzw. für die Gesellschaft als ganze” [“The Christian community presented itself as a model for the state, that is, for the society as a whole”] (*Der Epheserbrief* [ZB NT 8; Zürich: Theologischer Verlag, 1985] 100). I have argued elsewhere that in Eph 5:18 Paul is commanding his readers to carry out their identity as the household of God, the place where God in Christ dwells by the Spirit. This is the force of the command to “be filled by the Spirit” (πληροῦσθε ἐν πνεύματι). Paul had previously noted that the church is the new temple of God by the Spirit in Eph 2:21–22, the same phenomenon to which he refers in Eph 1:23, where the church is “the fullness” (τὸ πλήρωμα) of Christ. Further, Paul had prayed that God would work powerfully in his people so that they might be “filled” (πληρωθῆτε) with all the “fullness of God” (πλήρωμα τοῦ θεοῦ). Finally, he had discussed the giving of gifted leaders by Christ for the purpose of the growth of the Church unto the measure of “the fullness of Christ” (τοῦ πληρώματος τοῦ Χριστοῦ) (Eph 4:13). Therefore, in his command in Eph 5:18 to “be filled (πληροῦσθε) by the Spirit,” he is not exhorting his readers to be *controlled* by the Spirit vis-à-vis intoxication with wine, but rather to actualize effectively their identity as the dwelling place of God in Christ by the Spirit (cf. Timothy G. Gombis, “Being the Fullness of God in Christ by the Spirit: Ephesians 5:18 in its Epistolary Setting,” *TynBul* 53 [2002] 259–71).

²⁵ Discussing the culture of patriarchy in the first century, Scott Bartchy claims that domination involved more than men dominating women. “In a wide variety of cultures, men are brought up to gain honor for themselves precisely by dominating as many others as they can, both men and women.” He states further, that across “all social classes, traditional male socialization programmed males to pursue a never-ending quest for greater honor and influence” and that this “systemic quest for honor by competition among men” resulted in the “domination of males by other males” (“Who Should Be Called Father? Paul of Tarsus between the Jesus Tradition and Patria Potestas,” *BTB* 33 [2003] 136).

character of the evil powers who left their appointed stewardship of creation and plunged the cosmos into disarray, disorder and chaos.

The *Haustafel* must also be read as an extension or elaboration of the command in Eph 5:18–21 to “be filled by the Spirit”—which is a call to embody and actualize the identity of the New Humanity as the dwelling place of God in Christ. The *Haustafel* is not subordinate merely to the final participle ὑποτασσόμενοι, though this participle provides the point of transition. The broader context, especially 5:18–21, must be kept in view, which is clear from the fact that much of the discussion in the *Haustafel* is not driven by this participle. Though the *Haustafel* structurally is subordinate to ὑποτασσόμενοι, a bulk of the discussion is taken up with instruction directed to those in positions of power, and nine of the 21 verses are directed toward the headship of husbands in relation to their wives.

The *Haustafel*, as it appears in Ephesians, is designed to make a number of vital points. First, in the New Humanity—vis-à-vis the present fallen age as perverted by the evil powers—there is order, which is evident from the participial phrase that provides the point of transition, “subordinating yourselves to one another” (ὑποτασσόμενοι ἀλλήλοις, 5:21). Most scholars attempt to read this as a command for mutual submission.²⁶ On such a view the members in the three pairs—husbands/wives, parents/children, and slaves/masters—are to submit mutually to one another. Such a reading coheres well with similar Pauline contexts, such as Philippians 2, where Paul exhorts his readers on the basis of the example of Jesus Christ, who gave up his life unto death in order to be exalted by God. In the same way, believers should consider each other’s needs more important than their own. On this view, the relationships delineated in the *Haustafel* detail the manner in which such a mutual submission ought to be carried out.

While such a reading makes good sense within this context and is quite attractive on a number of counts, it cannot be sustained. First, the verb ὑποτάσσω means “to subordinate,” and points to a structure within society that involves a hierarchical ordering.²⁷ It does not have the more general meaning of “submitting,” in the sense of being considerate of others.²⁸ Some writers have noted this factor but claim that the reciprocal pronoun ἀλλήλοις overrides such a consideration and calls for mutuality.²⁹ Paul’s expression here, however, is due to his having to refer to relationships within new creation communities, instead of toward outsiders. As the *Haustafel* unfolds, it is

²⁶ Lincoln, *Ephesians* 365; Russ Dudrey, “‘Submit Yourselves to One Another’: A Socio-Historical Look at the Household Code of Ephesians 5:15–6:9,” *ResQ* 41 (1999) 40; Muddiman, *Ephesians* 256–57; Keener, *Paul, Women and Wives* 157–72; Thomas R. Yoder Neufeld, *Ephesians* (Believers Church Bible Commentary; Scottsdale, PA: Herald, 2002) 243–44; Martin Kitchen, *Ephesians* (New Testament Readings; London: Routledge, 1994) 99–100; Michel Bouttier, *L’Épître de Saint Paul aux Éphésiens* (CNT 9B; Genève: Labor et Fides, 1991) 236–37.

²⁷ Ernest Best, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Ephesians* (ICC; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1988) 517.

²⁸ Andrew Perriman, *Speaking of Women: Interpreting Paul* (Leicester: Apollos, 1998) 53.

²⁹ E.g. Yoder Neufeld, *Ephesians* 243.

clear that Paul does not order the relationships along mutually submissive lines.³⁰

A more satisfying reading, for which we are arguing, regards the *Haustafel* as aimed at counteracting the devastating effects of the powers upon human relationships and in transforming relationships within appropriate hierarchical structures. The solution that Paul provides does not involve overthrowing such structures, but rather subjecting them to new creation dynamics so that relationships within the New Humanity take on a renewed character. In this context, then, Paul is not calling for mutual submission, but for the ordering of the New Humanity in such a way that involves subordination.

The *Haustafel* as it appears in Ephesians does not identify the corruption of the powers in patriarchy or hierarchicalism *per se*, but in the perversion of relationships by selfishness and greed, leading alternatively to domination and rebellion. As we will demonstrate below, the patriarchy that is advocated in Ephesians has its source in the character of God who is most clearly revealed in the self-giving Jesus, whose “headship” is characterized by self-sacrificial love for those for whom he is Lord and head. But this is neither a blanket endorsement of cultural norms nor a kind of social conservatism, for, as our discussion will demonstrate, Paul is radically re-orienting how relationships are to be conceived.³¹

A second point made by the *Haustafel* is that the New Humanity is ordered under the Lordship of Christ. This speaks to the chaotic and perverted situation as it exists because of the corruption of creation by the powers, which has its source in the powers’ rejection of their “modesty” and having “claimed for themselves an absolute value,” in the words of J. H. Yoder.³² The powers did not maintain their positions as stewards of creation, but rather ceased to recognize the sovereign lordship of the Most High God and proceeded to carve out corners of the cosmos for themselves, leading to the corruption of creation and the enslavement of humanity. In a renewal and restoration of the original creation, the New Humanity operates “in the fear of Christ” (5:21), with both slaves and masters recognizing that they are ultimately accountable

³⁰ 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) 117; Perriman, *Speaking of Women* 52–53.

³¹ Contra Mußner, who claims that the NT “Haustafeln nicht in Opposition gegen die heidnische Umwelt entwickelt worden sind” [“house tables are not developed in opposition to the pagan environment”] (*Epheser* 153). Further, Best is wrong to claim that “[t]he advice of the household code echoes in large part what the better pagan moralists were saying and is in no sense revolutionary” (*Ephesians* [NTG; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993] 85). It is outside the scope of this article to engage the debate over Paul’s “failure” to call for the overturn of ancient patriarchal structures altogether—a discussion heavily freighted with unexamined historical and ethical assumptions and examples of gross anachronism (cf. Bartchy, “Who Should Be Called Father?” 140; Dunn, “Household Rules” 61; Lührmann, *Epheserbrief* 83–97; Dudley, “Submit Yourselves” 41). The contemporary hermeneutical issues of ecclesiastical appropriation of the *Haustafel* will be left to the side as well.

³² John Howard Yoder, *The Politics of Jesus: Vicit Agnus Noster* (2d ed.; Carlisle: Paternoster, 1994) 142.

to their Lord Christ (6:9). This is reinforced by the very argument of Ephesians that has at its core the cosmic Lordship of Christ, and is further emphasized by the portrayal of God as the cosmic *Paterfamilias* (Eph 3:14–15) with “all things” in heaven and earth ordered under his ultimate authority.

Third, the model of headship and authority in the New Humanity follows that of God in Christ: self-giving and cruciform. One of the most remarkable features of the *Haustafel* in Ephesians is the extended discussion of husbands and how they are to follow Christ in loving and giving themselves up for their wives. It is remarkable that nothing in this context is mentioned about the husband controlling or manipulating his wife or controlling his children or those under stewardship. This is in striking contrast to similar household codes from the ancient world, where the focus was on the right management of the household for the comfort and happiness of the husband/patriarch, with no thought given to a sacrificial lifestyle of the “head” for the sake of other members of the household. Similarly, parents are called upon to train and nurture their children. While these may sound like quite harmless commands to the modern ear, they are spoken in the context of the absolute power of the patriarch over his family, which often was abused or used harshly in the ancient world.

Fourth, those in positions of subordination are to be subordinate “from the heart” and adopt a similar cruciformity. This is in contrast to survival strategies of manipulation that such people might adopt in the face of horrible treatment at the hands of superiors. Thus, each level of the hierarchy—the entire New Humanity—reflects the character of Christ himself. That is, it reflects the character of the New Humanity as created “according to God” (Eph 4:24), and the cruciform example of Christ shapes the character of the entire new creation.

1. *Wives and husbands.* The first pair of relationships that Paul addresses is that of the husband and wife. Unlike contemporary household codes, Paul first addresses the subordinate member of the pair, as he continues to do for the remaining pairs. Wives are to subordinate themselves to their husbands “as to the Lord” (ὡς τῷ κυρίῳ) (5:22).³³ This command is based on the headship of the man in relation to his wife in the same way that Christ is the head of the church. He writes in verses 23–24:

because (ὅτι) a man is head (κεφαλῆ) of his wife as also Christ is head (κεφαλῆ) of the church, he is savior of the body; but as the church is subordinated (ὑποτάσσεται) to Christ, thus also the wives to their husbands in everything.

There are several striking differences between Paul’s instruction to wives in this text and the *oikonomia* tradition in the ancient world. First, the instruction regarding wives in the *oikonomia* tradition was directed to men as patriarchs, and wives were not addressed directly.³⁴ This entirely androcentric

³³ The verb ὑποτάσσω does not appear here, but is understood from the appearance of the participle in v. 21 (Heinrich Schlier, *Der Brief an die Epheser: Ein Kommentar* [Düsseldorf: Patmos, 1971] 250).

³⁴ Cf. Yoder, *The Politics of Jesus* 171–72.

viewpoint supports our earlier contention that the contemporary household codes were given for the benefit of patriarchs in that they were advised in how to manage or control their households—wives included—for their own benefit and for a stable society. In contrast to this, Paul addresses wives directly, exhorting them to participate fully and willingly in the New Humanity. He subverts the contemporary notion that the ordering of the household should be for the benefit of the patriarch or for those in power when he sets in parallel the “headship” of the husband in relation to his wife and that of Christ in relation to the church (v. 23). The headship of Christ is characterized by his providing salvation for the church, recalling Christ’s giving himself to death for the salvation of the church. This is the kind of “headship” Paul has in mind, so that those in subordinate positions in the New Humanity do not exist for the comfort of those at the top. Rather, those who have authority or power are to use it for the good, protection, and nurture of those subordinate to them.³⁵

Second, the *oikonomia* tradition reflected the contemporary notion that the woman was constitutionally inferior to her husband. According to Aristotle, the woman is less rational than the man, which explains her subordination to him:

Hence there are by nature various classes of rulers and ruled. For the free rules the slave, the male the female, and the man the child in a different way. And all possess the various parts of the soul, but possess them in different ways; for the slave has not got the deliberative part at all, and the female has it, but without full authority, while the child has it, but in an undeveloped form (*Pol.* 1260a 9–14).

Aristotle states that each of these different classes will display a different sort of virtue, and that of the woman is silence (*Pol.* 1260a 31).³⁶

Such a notion is completely absent from the *Haustafel* in Ephesians. Wives are not regarded as inferior nor as part of the household to be managed or manipulated for the happiness of the man in control. His discussion recognizes the cultural convention of the man “at the head” of the household, and he exhorts wives to subordinate themselves willingly to their husbands’ headship. Paul accords dignity to women and wives, while denying that their subordinate position is based on any alleged inferiority. This is a further reflection of the “newness” of the New Humanity and its distinction from the surrounding cultural patriarchy reflecting the fallen powers. In the New Humanity each person has dignity and is a valuable part of the new creation people of God.

³⁵ Bartchy captures well the contrast here between the vision of headship in the *Haustafel* in Ephesians and that in the contemporary culture. He claims that “the aspect of God’s power that human beings should imitate must result in empowerment of others, which stands in striking contrast to the understanding of power on which every patriarchal system is based, namely, domination” (“Who Should Be Called Father?” 137).

³⁶ Cf. also *Pol.* 1269b 12–1270a 15; V 1313b 33–36; 1314b 26; VI 1319b (Balch, *Let Wives Be Submissive* 36).

A third difference is that Paul patterns this relationship on that of Christ to the church, making it theologically rich and meaningful. The driving force of the *Haustafel* is not the comfort of the one at the head, nor is it a general quest for order as an end in itself. Rather, the goal of the New Humanity is to actualize effectively its identity as the household of God in Christ by the Spirit, reflecting the character of God in Christ in every way and at every level. Because of this, each person, whatever her position in the New Humanity hierarchy, is accorded dignity and honor and is given an appropriate motivation.

In the most extended portion of the *Haustafel*, Paul next addresses husbands (vv. 25–33). He commands husbands to love their wives “just as also (καθὼς καί) Christ loved (ἠγάπησεν) the church and gave himself up (παρέδωκεν) for her” (v. 25). Paul sets Christ as the example for the husband/patriarch, who gave his life for the salvation of the church. This self-giving had the purity and dignity of the church as its motivation (vv. 26–27). Further, Paul orders the husband/patriarch to love his wife as himself, seeking to care for her in her subordinate position in the same way that he would seek his own ease and comfort. This, too, is based on the relationship of Christ to the church as his body (vv. 28–30).

This instruction to the husband/patriarch is completely at odds with contemporary household codes and directly confronts the culture of domination fostered by the evil powers. First, husbands are commanded to “love” their wives, a command that appears in no other contemporary household code.³⁷ As we noted above, the focus in the *oikonomia* tradition is on the proper ordering of household units by the patriarch for his own comfort and ease. Second, husbands are not to dominate their subordinate wives, but their love is to imitate the self-sacrificial love of Christ. As Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza notes, this radically reorients patriarchy according to the character of the lordship of Christ.³⁸ Paul directly confronts the system of domination in the wider culture—fostered by the powers—where the great authority that is invested in patriarchs over their entire households was often exercised with conniving manipulation. Husbands are to resist the temptation to operate according to the Old Humanity, and not to take advantage of their position as the head, but rather to use the power of their position for the sake of their wives.

Third, Paul orders husbands to view their relationship to their wives along the same lines as the unity between Christ and the church. They are to see their wives as united to them and to care for them as their own bodies. This rules out viewing wives as inferior, nor are they to be viewed as subordinates that can be manipulated for the husband’s ease. Rather, in opposition

³⁷ In reference to this command, Schrage states that “es ist zugleich evident, daß das Verhalten der Christen im οἶκος nicht einfach der Konvention entspricht” [“it is also evident that the Christian approach to the οἶκος simply does not correspond to the secular convention”] (“Zur Ethik der zeutestamentlichen Haustafeln,” *NTS* 21 [1974] 13).

³⁸ Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her: A Feminist Theological Reconstruction of Christian Origins* (London: SCM, 1983) 269–70.

to other household codes, husbands must seek the best interests and dignity of their subordinate wives. Again, the example here is the *self-giving* Christ, not the one who seeks to dominate others in an effort to uphold one's own place.

While Paul does not here call for the overthrow of patriarchy, he does indeed call for the relationship between husbands and wives to be oriented according to the New Humanity. This is a radical confrontation to the corruption and abuse in patriarchal systems found within the Old Humanity, which is oriented according to the character of the fallen powers.

2. Parents and children. Paul again begins by addressing the subordinate member of this pair, as he exhorts children to “obey your parents in the Lord, for this is righteous (δικαιον)” (Eph 6:1).³⁹ That children would be addressed at all is extraordinary, since, like wives, children are not addressed in the *oikonomia* tradition, where the focus is on the patriarch subduing or establishing dominion over his children.⁴⁰ By commanding children regarding their subordinate role in the New Humanity, Paul grants them dignity and affirms their valued position. Further, this instruction is not condescending, nor does it involve the claim that young children are inferior in any way. Rather, Paul motivates them by pointing out that this is the way of blessing from the Lord. By doing what is righteous—subordinating themselves to their parents, their authorities under the Lordship of Christ—they will receive the blessing that the Lord has promised.⁴¹

Paul sets “fathers” (οἱ πατέρες) as the corresponding member of this middle pair, in a change from “parents” (τοῖς γονεῦσιν) in Eph 6:1, signaling that he is addressing the power and authority invested in patriarchs of households and the great potential for the abuse of such power.⁴² Fathers are not here instructed to control their children to maximize family honor, nor to manipulate the direction or social trajectory of their lives. Rather, in a radical exhortation that is too often underappreciated, Paul exhorts fathers to avoid provoking their children to anger, and instead to “bring them up” (ἐκτρέφετε) in the “discipline” (παιδεία) and “instruction” (νουθεσία) of the Lord (Eph 6:4). This cryptic command is often viewed as too brief and only lightly touching on this vital household relationship.⁴³ Yet it is profound, in that this is a demand for fathers to act with a view to the best interests of their children.

³⁹ The exhortation to τέκνα (“children”) has children of all ages in view, both young and adult (Lincoln, *Ephesians* 403; Yoder Neufeld, *Ephesians* 269).

⁴⁰ Yoder, *The Politics of Jesus* 171–72.

⁴¹ On the debated description of the command as “the first command with a promise” (ἐντολή πρώτη ἐν ἐπαγγελίᾳ) (Eph 6:2), see Schlier, *Epheser* 281; Thorsten Moritz, *A Profound Mystery: The Use of the Old Testament in Ephesians* (NovTSup 85; Leiden: Brill, 1996) 153–77.

⁴² Yoder Neufeld, *Ephesians* 269–70. The power of the *paterfamilias* across all traditions in the Greco-Roman world is well attested. In Roman society, *patria potestas* gave great authority over children to the father, though by the first century it is likely that fathers could not put their children to death (Keener, “Family and Household” 357). Grown daughters and sons usually were still bound under their father’s authority until he died (Bartchy, “Who Should Be Called Father?” 136).

⁴³ Cf. Best, *Commentary on Ephesians* 568.

Further, it demands that the dignity and the desires of the children be considered, for provocation to anger would result from fathers frustrating the goals and desires of their children, acting only in the perceived best interest of family honor and exploiting the weaker position of their children. Instead of taking advantage of their powerful position, fathers must train their children in the way of the Lord, another reminder of the stewardship given to fathers and of their accountability to the Lord Jesus Christ.

3. *Slaves and masters.* Besides exhortation to husbands, the instruction to slaves is the most extensive (Eph 6:5–8), which may reflect the large number of slaves in early Christian congregations. The situations faced by slaves had a wide range of possibilities, since some would have been quite well trained, while others would have endured horrible treatment at the hands of their masters. Slaves were often thought of as property (Aristotle, *Eth. nic.* V 1134b 11) and treated accordingly.⁴⁴ Because of such treatment, the temptation to rebel against their masters would have been nearly overwhelming. Occasionally, such sentiments boiled over, causing massive slave rebellions, or incidences of slaves murdering their masters.⁴⁵ The instruction regarding slaves in the *oikonomia* tradition was focused on the patriarch's domination and control of his slaves.⁴⁶

Into this situation, Paul exhorts slaves to be obedient to their masters and to serve them as “slaves of Christ, doing the will of God in sincerity” (ἐκ ψυχῆς) (v. 6). Again, the *Haustafel* is unique in that it directly addresses slaves, granting them a dignified and proper place in the New Humanity. They are not told to submit to their masters out of concern for mere survival or the smooth running of society, but to cultivate an eschatological focus, doing good to their masters with the knowledge that “the Lord” (κυρίου) will reward the good that is done to all, “whether slave or free” (εἴτε δούλος εἴτε ἐλεύθερος) (v. 8).

Paul finally addresses the masters (οἱ κύριοι) of slaves in v. 9. His instruction is brief, but this may be because of the extended instruction previously to husbands/patriarchs. Further, it is likely that the exhortation to “do the same things to them (i.e. to slaves)” (τὰ αὐτὰ ποιεῖτε πρὸς αὐτοῖς) in verse 9 is an exhortation to slave masters to treat their slaves in such a way that reflects their recognition of the Lordship of Christ and the eschatological

⁴⁴ On slavery in ancient Rome, see Keith Bradley, *Slavery and Society at Rome* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994); Peter Garnsey, *Ideas of Slavery From Aristotle to Augustine* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

⁴⁵ Tacitus records the massive execution of slaves in the household of a Roman prefect who was murdered because of a homosexual rivalry (*Annals* 14.42–45). While the killer was identified, Roman law required that all the slaves in a household be put to death because of the presumption that all may have been involved in the plot. The case was debated in the Senate because of the great revulsion at the thought of executing over four thousand innocent slaves, but it was decided that all the slaves and their families, including women and children, must be put to death so as to discourage any future rebellion (Dudrey, “Submit Yourselves” 30–31).

⁴⁶ Keener, “Family and Household” 363–64.

judgment based on deeds, irrespective of social rank.⁴⁷ Paul states the impartiality of God explicitly, commanding masters to “give up threatening” (ἀνιέντες τὴν ἀπειλήν), knowing that they have the same Lord in heaven who does not show favoritism (v. 9b).⁴⁸

This is a similarly radical challenge to the manner in which slaves were treated in the first century and a departure from the *oikonomia* tradition.⁴⁹ The temptation to dominate slaves and keep them oppressed would have been great, especially since slave rebellions would have been a constant threat, with slave populations being quite large in many cities.⁵⁰ According to a proverb attributed to Diodorus Siculus, “every slave we own is an enemy we harbor.”⁵¹ Because of this great temptation to mistreat household slaves, or to view them with extreme suspicion, Paul’s command is neither cryptic nor merely obligatory, but rather a stern call, consistent with his exhortations to patriarchs and fathers, to recognize the Lordship of Christ, and that authority over another person is not an opportunity for exploitation or manipulation, but rather a stewardship—a responsibility to protect, provide for, and treat with dignity another person who is also under the Lordship of Christ.

III. CONCLUSION

I have argued that in the *Haustafel* in Ephesians Paul lays out a manifesto for a radically New Humanity, giving concrete instruction regarding the manner in which the new creation people of God are to conduct relationships. Paul is not being socially conservative in maintaining a place for hierarchicalism, nor is he merely trying to shield early Christian communities from imperial pressure. Rather, his exhortations are radical in that they directly confront and subvert the social structures of contemporary society. The Old Humanity has been corrupted by the malign influence of the powers and authorities, and the New Humanity—the Church—is the new creation people of God, created “according to God in righteousness and holiness of the truth” (Eph 4:24) and wholly oriented by the self-sacrificial love of Christ.

⁴⁷ H. Hoehner, *Ephesians: An Exegetical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002) 815; Best, *Commentary on Ephesians* 580; Rudolf Schnackenburg, *Ephesians: A Commentary* (trans. Helen Heron; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1991) 265. Some writers cite this instruction here as evidence that the *Haustafel* has to do with mutual submission, so that the command here has in view the masters making themselves servants to their slaves (cf. Richard Bauckham, *God and the Crisis of Freedom: Biblical and Contemporary Perspectives* [Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2002] 126; Kitchen, *Ephesians* 110).

⁴⁸ Bouttier, *Éphésiens* 255.

⁴⁹ According to Aristotle, “The relation of master to slaves is also tyrannic, since in it the master’s interest is aimed at. The autocracy of a master appears to be right . . .” (*Eth. nic.* VIII 1160b 23).

⁵⁰ Dudrey, “Submit Yourselves” 30.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*