

A Radically New Humanity: The Function Of The Haustafel In Ephesians

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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

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). **You must have a subscription and be logged in to read the entire article.**

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