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Justification for *Haustafeln* in the Ten Commandments

Philo of Alexandria (ca. 25 BCE–ca. 50 CE) was a Hellenistic Jewish writer contemporaneous with Jesus. In one of his documents, he explains that the modern household codes so popular in the Roman world find support in the Jewish Scriptures, since they can be viewed as spelling out the implications of the fourth commandment¹ (“Honor your father and your mother”):

In the fifth commandment on honouring parents we have a suggestion of many necessary laws drawn up to deal with the relations of old to young, rulers to subjects, benefactors to benefited, slaves to masters.

For parents belong to the superior class of the above-mentioned pairs, that which comprises seniors, rulers, benefactors and masters, while children occupy the lower position with juniors, subjects, receivers of benefits and slaves. And there are many other instructions given, to the young on courtesy to the old, to the old on taking care of the young, to subjects on obeying their rulers, to rulers on promoting the welfare of their subjects, to recipients of benefits on requiting them with gratitude, to those who have given of their own initiative on not seeking to get repayment as though it were a debt, to servants on rendering an

affectionate loyalty to their masters, to masters on showing the gentleness and kindness by which inequality is equalized.²

1. “Honor your father and mother” is the fourth commandment according to traditional numbering used in Jewish, Roman Catholic, Anglican, and Lutheran communities. Other Protestant traditions often follow a different system of numbering developed by John Calvin. According to that system, “Honor your father and mother” would be the fifth commandment.

2. Philo, “On the Decalogue (*De Decalogo*),” trans. F. H. Colson. Loeb Classical Library, vol. 7 (London: Harvard University Press, 1998), 98.