

## *The Christian Household*

Ephesians 5:21–6:9 presents a modified *Haustafel*, or table of household duties, appropriate for Christians, who also belong to the household of God (2:19). Such tables were common in Greco-Roman writings, but this one is distinctive in that it includes directives to the more powerful members of the household: the instructions are for not just wives but also husbands, not just children but also fathers, not just slaves but also masters.

These directives seem antiquated and oppressive to many modern readers, who believe that wives are to be equal partners in a marriage, not subjects of the husband's domain; children should be taught respect rather than blind obedience; slaves should be emancipated, not intimidated into obedience.

The early Christians were not so radical as to deny the basic ranking of responsibilities that society assigned to such relationships (but see Gal. 3:28). Nevertheless, the traditional *Haustafel* is set here within a context of *mutual* submission (Eph. 5:21), and the overall focus is shifted toward responsibilities of the more powerful party—this in keeping with the servant ethic encouraged by Jesus in the Gospels (Mark 10:41–45; John 13:1–7). Most notable, perhaps, is the notion that husbands are to love their wives in the same way that Christ loved the church: they are to put their wives' wants and needs ahead of their own, giving of themselves in selfless service. This call to husbands probably is based on a social distinction rather than on gender characteristics: the main point is that the impact of Christ's universal call to self-denial is proportionately related to status and power (cf. Mark 8:34).

Other examples of *Haustafeln* are found in Colossians 3:18–4:1; 1 Timothy 2:8–15; 5:1–2; 6:1–2; Titus 2:1–10; 1 Peter 2:13–3:7 (see also two letters by other early church leaders: *1 Clement* 1:3; 21:6–9; Polycarp, *To the Philippians* 4:1–6:2).