



Paul's Letter to the Colossians Study
Bible Study Session 14
Colossians 3:18-19 : Topic 7.1
"Husband and Wives in the Family"

Study By
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Greek NT

La Biblia
 de las Américas

NRSV

NLT

18 Αἱ γυναῖκες, ὑποτάσσεσθε τοῖς ἀνδράσιν ὡς ἀνήκεν ἐν κυρίῳ. 19 Οἱ ἄνδρες, ἀγαπάτε τὰς γυναῖκας καὶ μὴ πικραίνεσθε πρὸς αὐτάς.ο

18 Mujeres, estad sujetas a vuestros maridos, como conviene en el Señor. 19 Maridos, amad a vuestras mujeres y no seáis ásperos con ellas.

18 Wives, be subject to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord. 19 Husbands, love your wives and never treat them harshly.

18 You wives must submit to your husbands, as is fitting for those who belong to the Lord. 19 And you husbands must love your wives and never treat them harshly.

The Study of the Text:¹

1. What did the text mean to the first readers?

With Col. 3:18-19, we begin a new unit of moral admonition. Everything is still being built off the foundation of 3:1-4, but 3:18-4:1 shifts to the believing family as its theme. The church, as the body of Christ, is also the family of God with extensive emphasis upon believers as the children of God. For the church to have a strong witness its families must be strong spiritually. Early Christianity recognized the importance of this. The apostles Paul and Peter sought to develop this understanding in their ministries, as Col. 3:18-4:1, Eph. 5:22-6:9, and 1 Pet. 2:18-3:7 make very clear.²

The definition of family in the ancient world differed slightly from a common understanding in modern western society. In the ancient world, it was comprised of three sets of relationships: the wife to her husband, the children to their father, and slaves to their master. The first two sets continue to form the core of a modern family, while the elimination of slavery has discontinued the third set of relationships. Consequently the modern application of the discussion of slaves and masters poses something of a challenge. Typically, efforts will be made to apply the concepts here to a employee / employer relationship in the work place, rather than in a family setting. The closer application, however, in a modern situation is where inside the home 'domestic help' such as maids, butlers etc. are employed by the family. How the family treats such people comes clearly under the perspective of Paul's and Peter's discussion.

The Christian Life Col. 3:1-4:6
Foundation 3:1-4
Putting to death 3:5-11
Getting dressed 3:12-17
Building a Christian family 3:18-4:1
Establishing a Christian community 4:2-6

The Christian life in community includes both the corporate community and the Christian family as a part of the larger community. All of these segments come off the foundational principle set forth at the beginning.

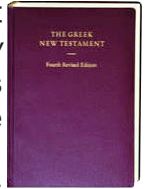
Historical Context:

¹Serious study of the biblical text must look at the 'then' meaning, i.e., the historical meaning, and the 'now' meaning, i.e., the contemporary application, of the scripture text. In considering the historical meaning, both elements of literary design and historical aspects must be considered. In each study we will attempt a summary overview of these procedures in the interpretation of the scripture text.

²These three texts are the primary examples of the so-called Haustafeln, 'Domestic Code,' inside the Bible. This was an important part of ancient discussion and debate in the surrounding culture of early Christianity. See **Literary Form** for more details.

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External History. In the hand copying of the Greek text of this passage over the first millennium of Christian history no variations in wording surface that the editors of *The Greek New Testament* (4th rev. ed.) considered significant enough to have an impact on the translation of this text. This does not mean that variations are not present, but only that they are minor and have little impact on how the text should be translated into other languages.



The text apparatus of the *Novum Testamentum Graece* (27th rev. ed.) does list two places where variations surface.³ Some copyists sought to highlight the possessive “your” in reference to both wives and husbands, particularly to stress that the relationship obligations were to one’s own spouse and not to others. Again these efforts, mostly by only a few copyists at a late date generally, are stylistic and attempts to clarify the precise meaning of the statements.



Thus with great confidence in the original wording of these verses, we can exegete the adopted reading of the passage.

Internal History. The most important historical aspect of 3:18-19 is the ancient understanding of family. One cannot begin to understand this text, and its related emphasis in Eph. 5:22-32 and 1 Pet. 3:1-7, without a clear perception of family in the first century world. And the challenge in this quest for understanding is to identify the diversity of views of family that were present in that world, for although most ancient cultures were heavily ‘male dominating’ families, widely differing ideas about how the family should function existed in that world. For the New Testament, the Jewish and Greco-Roman viewpoints stand as most crucial, although variations of these and the more regionally based ethnic oriented views such as the Egyptian, Mesopotamian etc. gave distinctive flavor to the idea of family in the differing cultures of that time.

Foundational is an awareness of the way marriages took place in that world. Unlike modern western culture where a young man and a young woman themselves choose to get married, usually after a period of courtship, marriages universally in the ancient world were ‘arranged’ by the parents and / or guardians of the boy and the girl.⁴ Although the level of involvement by the boy and the girl in this process could vary from culture to culture and from circumstance to circumstance,⁵ the decision regarding whom the boy and the girl married rested largely in the hands of the father or guardian of each.⁶ Also in most ancient cultures, the girls began wearing veils once they reached puberty and consequently were completely covered, especially when outside the family home. Thus on most occasions the first time the new husband ever saw his bride was on their wedding night after the fathers had implemented the marriage contract agreed upon between them earlier, which in some cases was when the girl was a small child or an infant. In the earlier Old Testament Israelite pattern, remember the shock that Jacob received on his wedding night when he thought his bride

³Kolosses 3,18

* ανδ. υμων D* F G 075 it vg^{ms} syp.^{h**} (in place of τοις ἀνδράσιν, either τοις ἀνδράσιν υμων or ιδιοις ἀνδράσιν; all three readings mean “your husbands.” The two alternative readings simply intensify the emphasis on *your*.)

| ιδιοις ανδ. L 6. 365. 614. 630. 1175. 1881. 2464 *pm*

Kolosses 3,19

* υμων C² D* F G it vg^{cl} sy; Ambst Spec (similarly τας γυναϊκας has either υμων or εαυτων added for intensifying effect)

| εαυτων (ε^c κ² 075). 1175

| txt P⁴⁶ κ* A B C* D² Ψ 33. 1739. 1881 *M m** vg^{st,ww} sa^{ms} bo^{ms}; CI

[Eberhard Nestle, Erwin Nestle, Kurt Aland et al., *Novum Testamentum Graece*, 27. Aufl., rev. (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelstiftung, 1993), 529.]

⁴For some samples of ancient Marriage Contracts, see “Ancient History Sourcebook: A collection of Contracts from Mesopotamia,” *Fordham University Ancient Babylonian law* required such contracts, although the Law of Moses did not mandate them, but assumed their presence. For some Egyptian samples of Marriage Contracts, see “Marriage Contracts,” *Ancient Egypt*. For Marriage Contracts in the Greco-Roman world see “Marriage & Divorce Papyri of the ancient, Greek, Roman and Jewish World,” tyndalearchive.com.

⁵One quite interesting description of a marriage contract is found in Tobit 7:12-16

12 Then Raguel summoned his daughter Sarah. When she came to him he took her by the hand and gave her to Tobias, saying, “Take her to be your wife in accordance with the law and decree written in the book of Moses. Take her and bring her safely to your father. And may the God of heaven prosper your journey with his peace.” 13 **Then he called her mother and told her to bring writing material; and he wrote out a copy of a marriage contract, to the effect that he gave her to him as wife according to the decree of the law of Moses.** 14 Then they began to eat and drink. 15 Raguel called his wife Edna and said to her, “Sister, get the other room ready, and take her there.” 16 So she went and made the bed in the room as he had told her, and brought Sarah there. She wept for her daughter. Then, wiping away the tears, she said to her, “Take courage, my daughter; the Lord of heaven grant you joy in place of your sorrow. Take courage, my daughter.” Then she went out.

⁶For the Jewish history of this, see Hyyim Schauss, “Ancient Jewish Marriage,” *My Jewish Learning*.

was Rachel, but turned out to be Leah, the older sister.⁷ He had to work for Laban, his father-in-law, another seven years in order to receive Rachel as his bride.

Important in the background of ancient 'arranged' marriages was the reality that marriage was viewed as far more than a man and a woman coming together to form a family. Ultimately marriage was the bonding together of the two larger, extended families and / or clans represented by the boy and the girl. Thus the marriage needed to be made very carefully and in order to serve the best interests of the two extended families. This took much greater priority than the attitudes or feelings of the boy and the girl for one another.

It is largely out of this viewpoint that having children took on the critical importance that it had in ancient society. Children represented the 'mixing of the bloods' of the two extended families with the impact of sealing closer ties of peace and harmony between the two extended families. Failure to produce children, especially by the wife,⁸ was considered to be a serious threat to the peaceful relationship between the two extended families.

Additionally the Jacob / Rachel story in Genesis 39 illustrates another common pattern in ancient marriages across cultures and time periods in that world. Marriages mostly took place inside larger tribes and / or clans. This came about in large measure because of the arranged marriage tradition. But was intended to protect the 'purity' of the family lineage by preventing 'foreign' blood from entering the family. Thus Jacob married his uncle Laban's daughter, his cousin. Primarily with kings marrying daughters of the kings of neighboring countries for political alliance would marriage take place outside one's own tribal group. King Solomon is the primary example of this in Israelite history, and it was considered to be a source of his downfall from the biblical perspective of the Old Testament. Given the high tendency of mistrust and violent warfare between different groups in the ancient world, marriage was considered to be a primary means of cementing alliances for the mutual protection of the clans from outsiders. From all indication this attitude continued to dominate the first century world as well.

Also important to understand is the typical age gap between a husband and a wife in the ancient world. In the ancient world, unlike the modern world, 'adulthood'⁹ meant that the individual was eligible to be married off by his or her father. It did not have legal implications much beyond this. And the definition of 'adulthood' varied from culture to culture, and was dramatically different between males and females. The one point of basic commonality cross-culturally in the ancient world was that the female reached "adulthood" upon passing into puberty as an early teenager. This meant that her father would be eager to have a marriage contract for his daughter already in place and then he would seek to implement it as quickly as possible after she began having menstrual periods. Consequently most girls became a wife in their early to middle teen years. Should they pass out of the teen years without being married off, the possibility for their father to arrange a marriage contract for them diminished rapidly. For the boy, the situation was entirely different. The boy went through both childhood and youth before gaining adulthood. Youth could be defined differently. For the Greeks, it typically was from puberty to the middle to late twenties. Greek society generally defined

⁷See Genesis 39 for the biblical story. One should also remember that many distinctives about the relationship between Jacob and Rachel that were not typical contributed greatly to the inclusion of this narrative in the biblical text. Of greatest importance was the deep love of Jacob for Rachel prior to their getting married. In the ancient world, if love for one another ever played a role in a husband / wife relationship it was expected to be developed after the marriage ceremony, not before it. Quite interestingly, Paul encourage Titus to admonish the older Christian women on the island of Crete to help the younger women learn to love their husbands (Titus 2:3-5 NRSV):

"3 Likewise, tell the older women to be reverent in behavior, not to be slanderers or slaves to drink; they are to teach what is good, 4 so that they may encourage the young women to love their husbands, to love their children, 5 to be self-controlled, chaste, good managers of the household, kind, being submissive to their husbands, so that the word of God may not be discredited."

⁸In that male dominating society, the wife nearly always received the blame for not having children, whether it was the husband's fault or not. In the primitive medical awareness of that time male infertility was not known of. Couple that with male chauvinism at high levels in those cultures, and only in the rarest of circumstances would the husband be held at fault for not having children in the marriage.

⁹From a modern sociological definition: "An adult is a human being or living organism that is of relatively mature age, typically associated with sexual maturity and the attainment of reproductive age. In human context, the term has other subordinate meanings associated to social and legal concepts, for example a legal adult is a legal concept for a person who has attained the age of majority and is therefore regarded as an independent, self-sufficient, and responsible (contrast with 'minor'). Adulthood can be defined in terms of physiology, psychological adult development, law, personal character, or social status." ["Adult," Wikipedia online]

entrance into adulthood sometime in the middle to late twenties for the boy. This was a decision made by the local society. The Romans, on the other hand, had a long standing tradition of the *patria potestis*, in which the time of entrance into adulthood by the boy was solely determined by the father.¹⁰ Most Roman records suggest that this usually took place in the middle to late twenties of the son, unless the father felt the boy to be untrustworthy to carry on the family name and heritage properly. He might then delay granting adulthood to his son, or refuse to grant it completely. Jewish society by Jesus' day had established the defining moment of adulthood as the boy's thirtieth birthday. This was a societal decision, rather than a decision made by the father of the family.

The impact of this was that in most every marriage an age gap of between fifteen and twenty years existed between the husband and the wife. The wife would be in her early to middle teen years, while the husband would be at least in his middle to late twenties, and, in Jewish society, at least in his beginning thirties. No matter what the religious tradition might be, the simple sociological dynamic of such an age difference is going to favor the domination of the husband over his wife. To be factored into this is also the typical life-expectancy of males and females in the ancient world. In general, although exceptions were certainly present, the man in the first century world would seldom see his fiftieth birthday, while the woman could easily live into her early sixties. Consequently widowhood was extensive in that world for the wife by the time she reached her early to middle thirties. For a couple to be married more than twenty years before death separated them was not common. If the widow was still in her twenties or early thirties, she might be able to have her guardian, usually her oldest living brother if the father were dead, arrange for a second marriage. Virtually always she would return to her father's family upon the death of her husband because widows were a considerable financial obligation and the husband's family would seldom be willing to assume it. When her children were able to marry and provide for themselves, they would take on the responsibility of caring for their widowed mother as long as she was alive.

Marital fidelity differed widely among the ancient cultures. With homosexuality rampant among the Greeks, the husband would typically bring in young boys for his sexual pleasure, especially the sons of his slaves. Additionally, women and girls would become sexual objects as well, particularly female slaves. The Romans followed somewhat similar patterns although homosexual tendencies were not quite as extensive as among the Greeks. Because the Jews had the Torah of the Old Testament, only negative attitudes toward homosexual practices took deep root in the social patterns. In spite of repeated condemnation of sexual activity outside of marriage in the Old Testament, the very prevalent practice was to avoid only women already married to another man. Singles, widowed, and prostitutes were sought after rather widely, in addition to one's wife. Thus the typical wife of that time would have to cope with the reality of her husband having sexual relations with others beside herself.

Thus family meant something rather distinctive in the world of Jesus and Paul. The Christian teachings on family in the New Testament will challenge many of these deeply held traditions and practices. As such the gospel was understood as a radically new way of doing family.

Literary Aspects:

In this passage the literary qualities play an especially important role for proper understanding of its meaning.

Literary Form. At the **broad genre** level, we are still looking at the letter body of Colossians. Thus

¹⁰“The *pater familias* (plural: *patres familias*) was the head of a Roman family. The term is Latin for ‘father of the family’ or the ‘owner of the family estate’. The form is irregular and archaic in Latin, preserving the old genitive ending in -as (see Latin declension). The *pater familias* was always a Roman citizen.

“Roman law and tradition (*mos maiorum*) established the power of the *pater familias* within the community of his own extended *familia*. He held legal privilege over the property of the *familia*, and varying levels of authority over his dependents: these included his wife and children, certain other relatives through blood or adoption, clients, freedmen and slaves. The same *mos maiorum* moderated his authority and determined his responsibilities to his own *familia* and to the broader community. He had a duty to father and raise healthy children as future citizens of Rome, to maintain the moral propriety and well-being of his household, to honour his clan and ancestral gods and to dutifully participate - and if possible, serve - in Rome's political, religious and social life. In effect, the *pater familias* was expected to be a good citizen. In theory at least, he held powers of life and death over every member of his extended familia through ancient right but in practice, the extreme form of this right was seldom exercised. It was eventually limited by law.” [*Pater familias*,” Wikipedia online]

the occasional nature of ancient letters suggests the presentation of the materials in a manner distinctive appropriate to the initial readers. This becomes particularly clear with comparison to the parallel texts of Eph. 5:22-33 and 1 Pet. 3:1-7. Although similar in many ways, the distinctiveness of each of these three texts reminds us of the occasional nature of these letters.

At the **small genre** level, Col. 3:18-19 represents *paraenesis* in which the apostle is giving moral admonition to his readers to behave certain ways in their relationships with others. But the passage also represents a distinct form of ancient *paraenesis* labeled *Haustafeln*¹¹ in which the admonitions address proper relationships inside the ancient family and here between a wife and her husband.

One should note that the model family structure that serves as the backdrop for Paul's words are taken from an aristocratic family, and not from a peasant family. The aristocratic family possessed slaves who were considered an integral part of the family, while the peasant family, either Greco-Roman or Jewish, would not possess slaves. By using this family life example Paul could easily cover the full range of family relationships that would be found in his day. The application to his readers would be limited to how much of this family structure existed in their own family. Since the modern western family only includes the first two sets of these relationships, these become more crucial words for application to family life in today's world.

In the ancient world, much discussion of family relationships took place and reaches back several centuries prior to the time of Christ. The somewhat 'fixed' nature of 3:18-4:1 suggests that maybe the apostle is drawing from an established form of teaching and adapting it to the needs of the Colossians. Thus the question about sources arises. Different answers to this question have been set forth by scholars working in this area. Peter O'Brien in the *Word Biblical Commentary* summarizes this discussion:¹²

New Testament scholars have developed no consensus concerning the possible origin and background to the house-tables. Diverse and competing theories have not been able to explain the formal and material similarities with earlier ethical teaching elsewhere on the one hand, as well as the undoubted differences with Colossians 3:18-4:1, the oldest extant house-table, on the other. So at the end of his historical survey Crouch concluded: "Historical study of the Christian *Haustafeln* is at an impasse" (*Origin*, 32). The following are some of the more significant alternatives:

i. A Hellenistic Code

M. Dibelius (Dibelius-Greeven, 48-50), the first scholar to give serious attention to the question of background, claimed that the origin of the Christian house-tables was to be found in Hellenistic, and specifically Stoic, moral philosophy. Key expressions, such as "it is fitting" (ἀνήκειν, Col 3:18), "it is pleasing," i.e., to God (εὐάρεστον, v 20), were appealed to in support since they are frequently found in Stoic literature, while the expression "in the Lord" (ἐν κυρίῳ, v 20) was said to be only loosely attached as a Christian addition.

K. Weidinger, a pupil of Dibelius, defended and expanded his teacher's thesis. He noted that the *Haustafel* schema was based on the Stoic concept of duty (καθήκον) which in turn was an adaptation of "unwritten laws" (νόμιμα ἄγραφα): fear of the gods, honor toward parents, proper care of the dead, love of friends and fidelity toward country (cf. his *Die Haustafeln: Ein Stück urchristlicher Paränese* [UNT; Leipzig: J. C. Hinrichs, 1928] 27-34, 41, 42). There was no essential difference among Stoic, Hellenistic Jewish and Christian forms of these tables. Several writers mention similar obligations in tabulated form (e.g., Aristotle, *Pol* 1, 2; Seneca, *Ep* 94; Plutarch, *LibEd* 10; Epictetus, *Dissertationes*, 2, 10, 3, 7). A waning interest in an imminent Parousia and a growing recognition by Christians that they needed to come to terms with the world were the reasons (according to Dibelius) for the Christian adoption of such a schema. For Weidinger it was the need to regulate the inner life of the church on a nonenthusiastic, noneschatological basis (*Haustafeln*, 9; cf. Martin, *NIDNTT* 3, 931).

Although this theory has been popular, even axiomatic in some circles, it fails to account for the considerable differences in content between the Christian and non-Christian material, the different motivations and the unparalleled setting of the specific rubrics in Stoic writing. In the latter texts the stations are not addressed directly, nor is the imperative mood used; the naming of the station was sufficient to indicate the appropriate conduct (cf. Schroeder, *IDBSup*, 546).

ii. A Christian Code

At the other end of the spectrum K. H. Rengstorf (*Mann und Frau im Urchristentum*) sought to explain the Christian house-tables as being uniquely Christian. For him the differences between the Christian *Haustafeln* and the Hellenistic and Jewish parallels prevent the conclusion that they are slightly Christianized versions of a non-Christian paraenetic piece. Because all the persons addressed in the house-tables are members of the household, the major impulse in their formation is the early Christian interest in the house-hold (οἶκος). The emphasis is on the father as the head of the entire household

¹¹This was the label the Martin Luther gave to 3:18-4:1 in his original translation of the Bible in the early 1500s. The label has become widely used across many different languages.

¹²For a detailed synopsis of this discussion see Peter T. O'Brien, vol. 44, *Word Biblical Commentary : Colossians-Philemon*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 2002), 214-219.

rather than on sexual differences or distinctions in rank. According to Rengstorf the essentially Christian nature of the concerns of the house-tables may be compared with the similar elements in the infancy narratives of Luke 1, 2, where the home life of John the Baptist and Jesus are described. Joseph like Zechariah is head of the family, and the boy Jesus is submissive (ὑποτάσσομαι, “be subordinate,” in Luke 2:51; it is a key term in the epistles and a designation of the duty of the wife is a specifically Christian creation, see below).

For Schroeder (*Haustafeln*; *IDBSup*, 546, 547) the NT station codes reflect the influence of diverse traditions: formally, with their direct address, imperative mood and motivating statements, they are indebted to OT apodictic law (cf Deut 5:16). The content is drawn basically from the OT and Judaic tradition, though certain Greek (“what is fitting”) and Christian (ἀγάπη, “love”) concepts are added. The basic ethical conceptions of the NT station codes, according to Schroeder take us back to the teaching and example of Jesus himself. The occasion for the creation of the house-table was the gospel proclamation itself, and its setting in life was the teaching activity of the apostles. Specifically Paul created it because of a problem which in turn stemmed from his own declaration of the equality of all persons in Christ (Gal 3:28).

Both views have been subjected to a detailed critique by Crouch (*Origin*, 24–31, etc) who prefers a background in the following:

iii. A Hellenistic Jewish Code

With some variations several recent writers have traced the origin to Hellenistic Judaism, not in the sense that any exact parallel to the Colossian house-table is to be found in this source but that the material from which the *Haustafel* was formed came from Hellenistic Jewish sources (Crouch, *Origin*, Lohse, 154–57, Schweizer, for references see below; cf. Schrage, *NTS* 21 [1974–75] 7). Martin (NIDNTT 3, 931) speaks of a cluster of views that begin with the point of obedience to God’s will, seen first in Jewish injunctions (so Lohmeyer, 152–55) and expanded to include material used in gentile missionary outreach by Hellenistic Judaism (Crouch, *Origin*, 84–101). The main sources are Philo, *Hypothetica* 7:1–9 (cf. Decal 165–67), Josephus, Ap 2, 190–219, and *Ps Phocylides* 175–227, an Alexandrian Jew. Following Crouch Martin points out that these writers “show some hint of the so-called Noachian laws by which the conduct of Gentiles was to be governed in matters of elementary morals (concerning immorality, idolatry, dietary rules)” (NIDNTT 3, 931). There were links between these Noachian laws and the “unwritten laws” (νόμματα ἄγραφα), the basic moral and family duties of the Greeks. Here was a meeting place between Judaism and Hellenism where social duties were common to both cultures.

Lillie (*ExpTim* 86 [1974–75] 180, 181), while recognizing resemblances between the house-tables and Greek teachings, claims that the giving of good advice, particularly to such subordinates as wives, children or slaves, was something that both the Greek and later Roman Stoics loved to do. Further, Stoic teachings, diluted by popularizers, were part of the common culture of the later Hellenistic world, a culture in which Paul and other NT writers shared. Lillie, therefore, claims that the Jewish and OT influences appear far more important (cf. the quotation of the fifth commandment in the exhortation to children at Eph 6:2, 3 and the example of Sarah’s attitude to her husband given to wives in 1 Pet 3:6). Lillie concludes that the first person to use this house-table pattern of teaching needed only to have known the conventional views of morality prevailing in the Hellenistic world and the OT and Jewish traditions that any educated Jew would possess.

Schweizer, who has written extensively on the subject (cf. 159–171 and *Festschrift für Zimmerli*, 397–413, *Text*, 195–209), follows the general line that the Hellenistic patterns have reached the NT mediated by Hellenistic Judaism. However, he recognized certain differences between those of Hellenism and Hellenistic Judaism (cf. *Text*, 201, 202): first, in the former it is the male, adult and free individual who is instructed how to act over against his wife, children and slaves. But the Hellenistic Jewish tables, e.g., Philo, influenced by the OT, side with the weak, the minor and the unfree (so Israel is reminded of her slavery in Egypt, the married life of the neighbor is protected, and the authority of parents over children is limited by the first commandment). Second, while the aim of the Greek ethical rules was the self-perfection of the individual who ought to have a right attitude to inferiors and their needs (since this was really for his good and harmonized with the all-embracing divine order of the cosmos), the central interest of the ethical tables shaped by the OT was the protection of the weak and the helpless. So the partner is always taken seriously and all human beings, not only men but also wives, children and slaves, are treated as ethically responsible subjects.

Schweizer (*Text*, 202–204) in his treatment of Colossians 3:18–4:1, the first Christian house-table, has summarized some of the significant differences between it and earlier models. So wives, children and slaves are addressed equally with their husbands, fathers and masters. Although this is not totally new, there are no extant examples which are as thoroughgoing as Colossians 3:18–4:1 in this emphasis on reciprocal obligations. Wives, children and slaves are ethically responsible to do “what is fitting” as well as husbands, fathers and masters. Further, the readers are admonished “in the Lord.” This is no mere cipher, nor simply a loosely attached additional phrase (against Dibelius-Greeven, 49, and Weidinger, *Haustafeln*; so rightly Moule, 129, and Schweizer, in *Text*, 203; on the significance of the phrase see Schrage, *NTS* 21 [1974–75] 11, 19–22, and the exegesis below). Rather than living in conformity with the order of nature the reader is to regulate his life under the lordship of Christ and in conformity with his will. Finally, it is to be noted that the Colossian house-table follows on from chapter 3:17 and sets forth in concrete details some of those words and deeds to be done in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him. This naturally leads one to ask why Paul found it necessary to give this instruction here.

Occasion

The house-table may have been part of a larger complex of doctrinal and ethical material, that is, an early Christian catechism, which was easily learned by heart and given to new converts. But we have no direct evidence for this. Further, if the house-table scheme was integral to the early Christian catechism, why is there no evidence of it in the Thessalonian and Roman correspondence, or in 1 Corinthians where such a form would have been extremely appropriate? Why, too, do the *Haustafeln* not appear in James (the paraenetic character of which is undisputed), the Synoptic tradition or the Johannine literature? (For a critique of this view, presented with slight modifications by Seeberg, Carrington and Selwyn, see Crouch, *Origin*, 9–18.)

Dibelius considered that the Christian adoption of the house-table was to be found in a waning of an imminent Parousia while Weidinger understood it in terms of the need to regulate the inner life of the church on a nonenthusiastic, noneschatological basis (see above). But apart from the wider question as to whether the so-called delay of the Parousia played any part at all in the formation of the NT writings, any attempt to characterize the house-tables as protests against eschatological enthusiasm is unconvincing (cf. Schrage, *NTS* 21 [1974–75], 9, 10).

Others (including Crouch, *Origin*, 120–51, and Martin, *NIDNTT* 3, 931, 932) have argued that as Paul at 1 Corinthians 7:17–24 and 14:33–38 sought to correct a gnosticizing enthusiasm in Corinth based on a misunderstanding of the apostle's teaching in Galatians 3:27–29, to the effect that in Christ there was now the promise of social egalitarianism, so here the house-table of Colossians 3:18–4:1 confirms the restrictions as binding, thus safeguarding “the good order of the church against revolutionary attempts to undermine it by a false claim to unbridled freedom in the name of gnostic enlightenment and licence” (Martin, *NIDNTT*, 3 932). Although an overenthusiastic reception of the Pauline doctrine of freedom — such as is evident at Corinth — may have been a factor leading to the house-tables, it cannot be the only one since the emancipation of children was not an issue there (Schweizer, *Text*, 202; note also Schrage's criticisms, *NTS* 21 [1974–75] 4–6).

Particularly significant in the Colossians rule for the household are the references to the “Lord” (κύριος). The commands are furnished with the motivation “in the Lord” (ἐν κυρίῳ). So the readers are admonished “as is proper in the Lord” (ὡς ἀνήκεν ἐν κυρίῳ, v 18), and “for this is pleasing in the Lord” (τοῦτο γὰρ εὐάρεστόν ἐστιν ἐν κυρίῳ v 20). Paul reminds them of the fear of the Lord (φοβούμενοι τὸν κύριον, v 22) and their conduct is regarded as done for the Lord (ὡς τῷ κυρίῳ, v 23). Reference is made to the Lord's judgment (vv 24, 25; 4:1), while they are admonished to “serve the Lord Christ” (τῷ κυρίῳ Χριστῷ δουλεύετε, 3:24). If the phrase “in the Lord” provides the motivation, then the other references show that the whole life, thought and conduct of believers (cf. v 17) is submitted to the lordship of Jesus Christ (Lohse, 156, 157; Schrage, *NTS* 21 [1974–75] 19–22, Schweizer, *Text*, 203). Yet the household rules indicate how this obedience is concretely expressed, and it may be because the devotees of the false teaching at Colossae were indifferent to mundane and domestic affairs. Perhaps with their concern for ascetic practices, heavenly worship and visions of divine mysteries the false teachers wished to keep themselves as pure as possible from all contact with the world, and Paul has to remind the congregation of the pernicious nature of this teaching, recalling them to the simple duties of family life. This might appear surprising since the apostle has already summoned his readers to “set their minds on things that are above,” verse 2. Yet his idea of a life ruled from above where Christ is reigning is precisely that of a life in marriage, parenthood and everyday work (Schweizer, *Text*, 204). It is a life expressed in concrete statements, not in ideals, and as such follows on from and explains the injunction of verse 17, “and whatever you do, in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.”

The discussion in the ancient world was extensive about husband / wife relationships in the family. While similarities among these discussions to Christian emphases exist, important differences are also present both in terms of the boundaries of behavior and especially in the motivation behind behaving. Some of the Greek terms used in the secular discussions, notably ὑποτάσσω, are redefined in more positive, spiritually healthy ways by Paul. For example, ὑποτάσσω (submit) in Eph. 5:22 is defined as φοβέομαι (respect) in 5:33, along with the self-sacrificing example of Christ in His commitment to His church as the model for husbands to follow (vv. 25–30).¹³ Particularly at the point of why husbands and wives are committed to one another is a major distinguishing factor from the non-Christian discussions. The faith commitment of both to Christ with the ensuing obedience to His leadership lies at the heart of Christian relationships: we love one another because Christ loves us and we love Him. Achieving virtue or contributing to a stable society play little or no role at all in Christian couple's devotion to one another, while these served as the sole motivating

¹³The reality that Ephesians was written as a cover letter for Colossians and Philemon provides ready explanation for the abbreviated version in Colossians. The folks in the Lycus Valley would have heard Ephesians read to them along with these other two documents. Depending on the sequence of reading in each of the house church groups, Colossians would have either summarized the more detailed Ephesians text or Ephesians would have ‘fleshed out’ the brief Colossians expression. This same dynamic was expanded in the third section of slaves / masters with the reading of Philemon together with Ephesians and Colossians.

The expansion elements in Ephesians are more detailed than in Colossians which is ὡς ἀνήκεν ἐν κυρίῳ (“as is fitting in the Lord”) but ὡς τῷ κυρίῳ (“as to the Lord”) in Eph. Both begin with the comparative ὡς, ‘as’, clause, but Ephesians expands this with the image of Christ and the church in vv. 23-24.

And also to 1 Peter 3:1-6 (NRSV):

1 Wives, in the same way, accept the authority of your husbands, so that, even if some of them do not obey the word, they may be won over without a word by their wives’ conduct, 2 when they see the purity and reverence of your lives. 3 Do not adorn yourselves outwardly by braiding your hair, and by wearing gold ornaments or fine clothing; 4 rather, let your adornment be the inner self with the lasting beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is very precious in God’s sight. 5 It was in this way long ago that the holy women who hoped in God used to adorn themselves by accepting the authority of their husbands. 6 Thus Sarah obeyed Abraham and called him lord. You have become her daughters as long as you do what is good and never let fears alarm you.

3.1 Ὁμοίως γυναῖκες ὑποτασσόμεναι τοῖς ἰδίῳ ἀνδράσιν, ἵνα καὶ εἴ τινας ἀπειθοῦσιν τῷ λόγῳ διὰ τῆς τῶν γυναικῶν ἀναστροφῆς ἄνευ λόγου κερδηθήσονται 2 ἐποπτεύσαντες τὴν ἐν φόβῳ ἀγνὴν ἀναστροφὴν ὑμῶν. 3 ὣν ἔστω οὐχ ὁ ἔξωθεν ἐμπλοκῆς τριχῶν καὶ περιθέσεως χρυσίων ἢ ἐνδύσεως ἱματίων κόσμος, 4 ἀλλ’ ὁ κρυπτὸς τῆς καρδίας ἄνθρωπος ἐν τῷ ἀφάρτῳ τοῦ πραέως καὶ ἡσυχίου πνεύματος, ὃ ἐστὶν ἐνώπιον τοῦ θεοῦ πολυτελής. 5 οὕτως γὰρ ποτε καὶ αἱ ἅγιοι γυναῖκες αἱ ἐλπίζουσαι εἰς θεὸν ἐκόσμου ἑαυτάς, ὑποτασσόμεναι τοῖς ἰδίῳ ἀνδράσιν, 6 ὡς Σάρρα ὑπήκουσεν τῷ Ἀβραάμ, κύριον αὐτὸν καλοῦσα· ἣς ἐγενήθητε τέκνα ἀγαθοποιοῦσαι καὶ μὴ φοβούμεναι μηδεμίαν πτόησιν.

The 1 Peter materials also use the same core verbal admonition, ὑποτασσόμεναι τοῖς ἰδίῳ ἀνδράσιν, as in Colossians and Ephesians. But 1 Peter has set up a complex structure where this admonition builds off the foundational admonition in 2:13: “For the Lord’s sake accept the authority of every human institution...” (ὑποτάγητε πάσῃ ἀνθρωπίνῃ κτίσει διὰ τὸν κύριον). The expansion elements in 1 Peter 3:1b-6 focus on the Christian wife married to a non-Christian husband and offer advice on how to win him over to Christ. This is in line with his emphasis on Christian relations with non-Christians beginning in 2:13.

Admonition: “be subject to your husbands” (ὑποτάσσεσθε τοῖς ἀνδράσιν). Paul is clearly addressing Christian wives, and not single women, in the community of believers: Αἱ γυναῖκες.¹⁵ Although in the secular discussion this is one of the verbs used, and in those discussions usually suggests absolute adherence by the wife to the unquestioned authority of the husband,¹⁶ Paul and Peter modify this language in a variety

all things in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God, even the Father ; 21 and being subject to one another in the fear of Christ.”

18 καὶ μὴ μεθύσκεσθε οἴνῳ, ἐν ᾧ ἐστὶν ἀσωτία, ἀλλὰ πληροῦσθε ἐν πνεύματι, 19 λαλοῦντες ἑαυτοῖς ψαλμοῖς καὶ ὕμνοις καὶ ᾠδαῖς πνευματικαῖς, ᾄδοντες καὶ ψάλλοντες τῇ καρδίᾳ ὑμῶν τῷ κυρίῳ, 20 εὐχαριστοῦντες πάντοτε ὑπὲρ πάντων ἐν ὀνόματι τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ τῷ θεῷ καὶ πατρί, 21 ὑποτασσόμενοι ἀλλήλοις ἐν φόβῳ Χριστοῦ.

¹⁵“Wives are addressed first (as in Eph. 5:22; in 1 Pet. 3:1 following slaves, but before husbands). It is important to note that it is wives and not women generally who are in view (as also in 1 Cor. 14:34). Women who were single, widowed, or divorced and of independent means could evidently function as heads of their own households, as in the case of Lydia (Acts 16:14–15), Phoebe, the first named ‘deacon’ in Christian history and patron of the church at Cenchreae (Rom. 16:1–2), Chloe (1 Cor. 1:11), and presumably Nympha in Colossae itself (see on 4:15). The concern here is primarily for the household unit (Aletti, *Épître aux Colossiens* 251), with the implication that for Christians, too, its good ordering was fundamental to well-ordered human and social relationships. That wives are addressed first is presumably also a recognition that their relationship to their husbands was the linchpin of a stable and effective household.” [James D. G. Dunn, *The Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon : A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Grand Rapids, Mich.; Carlisle: William B. Eerdmans Publishing; Paternoster Press, 1996), 246-47.]

¹⁶“The call for wives to be subject (ὑποτάσσομαι, ‘subject oneself, be subordinate to’) is unequivocal, not even lightened by the prefixed call ‘Be subject to one another,’ or the addition ‘as the church is subject to Christ’ (as in Eph. 5:21, 24).¹⁶ The exhortation should not be weakened in translation in deference to modern sensibilities (cf. again 1 Cor. 14:34; so rightly Martin, *Colossians and Philemon* 119). But neither should its significance be exaggerated; ‘subjection’ means ‘subordination,’ not ‘subjugation’ (Schrage, *Ethics* 253; so also Aletti, *Épître aux Colossiens* 251–52). The teaching simply reflects the legal state of affairs, under Roman law at least, whereby the *paterfamilias* had absolute power over the other members of the family (OCD s.v. “patria potestas”). And while there were variations in Greek and Jewish law, the basic fact held true throughout the Mediterranean world that the household was essentially a patriarchal institution, with other members of the household subject to the authority of its male head (Verner 27–81). The exhortation here, therefore, simply conforms to current mores; the term itself is used by Plutarch, *Conjugalia praecepta* 33 (= *Moralia* 142E) and pseudo-Callisthenes 1.22.4 (in Lohse, *Colossians and Philemon* 157 n. 18; RAC 4.696; NDIEC 1.36; see also Müller 292–98; Schrage, *Ethics* 254). In contemporary legal terms the submission called for was of a piece with that called for in Rom. 13:1, 5 (cf. Tit. 2:5 with 3:1).¹⁷ Those who, on the one hand, wish to criticize Paul and the first Christians for such conformity at this point should recall that it is only in the last hundred years of European civilization that the perception of the status of wives (and women) and their expected roles has been radically changed. Those who, on the other hand, wish to draw normative patterns of conduct from Scripture cannot ignore the degree to which the instruction simply reflects current social patterns, an unavoidably conformist rather than transformist ethic (cf. Conzelmann 153).” [James D. G. Dunn, *The Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon : A*

of ways with new meaning. With this verb in Eph. 5:21 and in 1 Peter 2:13 referring to mutual submission and respect of one another inside the Christian community and by community members toward the outside world, the idea of a demeaning submissiveness by a wife to her husband is clearly not taught here.¹⁷ And in Paul's summarizing statement in Eph. 5:33 of both husband and wife duties, he uses a different word as synonymous to ὑποτάσσεσθε: "Nevertheless, each individual among you also is to love his own wife even as himself, and **the wife must see to it that she respects her husband.**" (πλὴν καὶ ὑμεῖς οἱ καθ' ἓνα ἕκαστος τὴν ἑαυτοῦ γυναῖκα οὕτως ἀγαπάτω ὡς ἑαυτόν, **ἡ δὲ γυνὴ ἵνα φοβῆται τὸν ἄνδρα**). Fundamental respect for him is required by God from the wife. Additionally one should not forget that the typical husband / wife relationship was between a man at least in his late twenties and for Jewish males at least thirty years of age and a woman in her early to middle teenage years. Given the ten to fifteen years of age difference between the husband and wife one would automatically expect a male dominated household, as would be the case in a similar modern situation.

What has to be decided is how relevant the ancient patriarchal family structure is to modern life. Some will try to argue that it is inherently sanctioned by God in passages such as these. But the reality that Paul adopted the basic mores of his own society, rather than advocated a radical new kind of family structure, raises series questions about the legitimacy of the patriarchal family "being ordained of God." An equally strong case -- if not stronger -- can be made exegetically here that Paul simply took the existing structures in society as the starting point, and then with the expansion elements he began qualifying them with timeless Christian principles that would ultimately change the nature of the relationships to an authentically Christian perspective. The modern application, then, becomes the same as that of Paul: how to genuinely "Christianize" existing family structures in our world so that the modern Christian family moves into truly Christian relationships inside the family, rather than just functioning in the existing secular structure.

Expansion: "as is fitting in the Lord." (ὡς ἀνήκεν ἐν κυρίῳ). The comparative clause imposes the key boundary on the requirement. Respect and submissiveness is limited to what is appropriate to the wife's Christian commitment. Peter O'Brien (WBC, p. 223) offers helpful analysis:

ὡς ἀνήκεν ἐν κυρίῳ. ... This expression may mean that the Lord Jesus is the criterion of what is fitting (cf. Schweizer, 165), or more likely it designates the proper attitude and behavior "within the new fellowship of those who own Christ as Lord" (Bruce, 289; cf. Best, *Body*, 4, and Moule, 129; on the significance of κύριος, "lord," in this household table, see 219).

This one phrase, although very generalized in its expression, opens up an important window into the Christian limits on the responsibilities of the wife to her husband. In the parallel expression in Eph. 22, ὡς τῷ κυρίῳ, Paul proceeds to elaborate on these limits of responsibility with the analogy of Christ and His church as the idealized model defining the husband-wife relationship: 23 ὅτι ἄνθρωπος ἐστὶν κεφαλὴ τῆς ἐκκλησίας ὡς καὶ

Commentary on the Greek Text (Grand Rapids, Mich.; Carlisle: William B. Eerdmans Publishing; Paternoster Press, 1996), 247.]

¹⁷"This verb occurs some twenty-three times in the Pauline corpus (τάγμα, 'order,' 'division,' and διαταγή, 'ordinance,' 'direction,' appear once each, τάξις, 'order,' twice and ὑποταγή, 'subjection,' 'subordination,' four times) and has to do with order. M. Barth (*Ephesians. Translation and Commentary* on Chapters 4–6 [AB 34A; Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1974], 4–6, 709–715; cf. Delling, *TDNT* 8, 41–45) discerns two groups of statements: (a) when the active ὑποτάσσω ('subordinate') is used (or the so-called divine passive) the power to subject belongs to God alone (1 Cor 15:24–28; Rom 8:20; Eph 1:21, 22; Phil 3:21; cf. Rom 13:1; Heb 2:8; 1 Pet 3:22; Luke 10:17, 20); (b) the apostle uses middle indicatives, participles or imperatives of the verb ὑποτάσσομαι (Robertson, *Grammar*, 807, suggests it may be a direct middle) to describe the subordination of Christ to God, members of the congregation to one another, believers with prophetic gifts, or wives, children and slaves (1 Cor 15:28; Eph 5:21; 1 Cor 14:32; Eph 5:22, etc). In the forty or so NT occurrences the verb carries an overtone of authority and subjection or submission to it. Here at Colossians 3:18, as Schweizer (164) claims, it denotes the subjection of oneself, as Christ subjected himself to the Father (1 Cor 15:28). The demand for mutual submission among Christians (Eph 5:21) shows that ὑποτάσσομαι ('be subordinate') bears a close relation to Christian ταπεινοφροσύνη ('humility'), as Delling (*TDNT* 8, 45) and Kamlah (*Verborum Veritas*, 237–43) have suggested. That the one verb can be used in an injunction to describe the attitude required of all Christians, whether in a 'dominating' or a 'subordinate' position, shows that the notion of interior dignity need not be present in the term (a point confirmed at 1 Cor 15:28 with reference to Christ; cf. E. Kähler, "Zur 'Unterordnung' der Frau im Neuen Testament," *ZEE* [1959] 1–13, *Frau*, 7. Crouch, *Origin*, 110, in his concern to note the history of religions parallels has not given sufficient attention to the other Pauline uses of the term). Schrage (*NTS* 21 [1974–75] 12) and others claim that the basis, motivation and emphasis on the subordination of wives to husbands in the NT are different from similar injunctions elsewhere in the ancient world. The exhortation to be subordinate is balanced with the instruction to husbands to love their wives: the admonition is an appeal to free and responsible agents that can only be heeded voluntarily, never by the elimination or breaking of the human will, much less by means of a servile submissiveness (Barth, *Ephesians* 4–6, 609); and finally its motivation is "in the Lord" (see below)." [Peter T. O'Brien, vol. 44, *Word Biblical Commentary: Colossians-Philemon*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 2002), 221–22.]

ὁ Χριστὸς κεφαλὴ τῆς ἐκκλησίας, αὐτὸς σωτὴρ τοῦ σώματος. 24 ἀλλὰ ὡς ἡ ἐκκλησία ὑποτάσσεται τῷ Χριστῷ, οὕτως καὶ αἱ γυναῖκες τοῖς ἀνδράσιν ἐν παντί. (23 For the husband is the head of the wife just as Christ is the head of the church, the body of which he is the Savior. 24 Just as the church is subject to Christ, so also wives ought to be, in everything, to their husbands.)¹⁸ In the family the husband is the ‘source of existence’ (κεφαλὴ¹⁹) for the wife, just as Christ is for the church. Thus, the wife is to give full loving respect and devotion to her husband, just as she does to Christ as a part of the church.

Unlike her non-Christian counterpart in the surrounding society who was expected to fulfill her ‘wifely duties’ to her husband without limitation,²⁰ the Christian wife was bound by God to function as a wife only within the framework of appropriate expression of religious devotion to Christ, her Savior and Lord. Demands from her husband that were contrary to Christian principles were to be rejected and refused by the wife.²¹ What Paul expects from Christian wives is a loving support of her husband that grows out of and reflects her spiritual commitment to Christ. It is that commitment to the Lord which defines the nature and limits of her commitment to her husband. This instruction is consistent with spiritual foundation for Christian living in 3:1-4 that serves as the ultimate basis for all the admonitions in 3:5-4:6.

To be clear, Paul is painting an idealized commitment for the Christian wife that she is to strive for. Different women would have reflected differing levels of accomplishment of this ideal among the Christian wives in the Lycus Valley of the mid-first century. But this is the target that all Christian wives should strive to incorporate into their relationships with their Christian husband -- both then and now.

Husbands’ responsibilities, v. 19:

Husbands, love your wives and never treat them harshly.

οἱ ἄνδρες, ἀγαπάτε τὰς γυναῖκας καὶ μὴ πικραίνεσθε πρὸς αὐτάς.

The parallel nature of the two admonitions to the husband underscore a complementary connection of the two to one another.²² To love contains the corollary opposite to not embitter or become embittered, as

¹⁸Interestingly, when Peter addresses the issue of a Christian wife married to a non-believer in 1 Peter 3:1-6, his admonitions to the Christian wife are couched within the framework of her spiritual commitment to Christ as well. Her τὴν ἐν φόβῳ ἀγνὴν ἀναστροφὴν ὑμῶν (v. 2, “purity and reverence of your lives”) was the key to winning her husband over to Christian faith.

¹⁹Here Paul clearly plays off the Jewish background of the figurative meaning of κεφαλὴ as defining point of existence and nourishment. That this is his intended meaning is made abundantly clear in his development of this imagery in Eph. 5:25-27.

²⁰The only limits that were imposed in ancient society on wives would have been any that her father might have had written into the marriage contract with her husband’s father.

²¹Given the male tendency toward immorality in that first century world, one of those demands she could refuse was to tolerate her husband’s involvement with other women, i.e., prostitutes, slave girls etc. She was perfectly within her rights to insist on his commitment exclusively to her as his wife. Of course, Paul’s instructions assume she has a Christian husband -- unlike Peter in 1 Peter. 3:1-6 -- and thus the husband was particularly accountable to God for his actions as well. That Christian men in the first century had a hard time walking away from the services of prostitutes is made very clear by Paul’s stern words in First Corinthians 6:12-20. Also similar blunt demands are made in 1 Thess. 4:3-8. He touches on this in 1 Cor. 7:1-7 as well.

²²The wife’s subordination to her husband has its counterpart in the husband’s duty to love his wife. This is not simply a matter of affectionate feeling (the more characteristic verb for this was φιλέω, to ‘feel or show affection’) or sexual attraction (for which one would have expected ἐράω, to ‘love with sexual desire’); rather, it involves his unceasing care and loving service for her entire well-being. Crouch (Origin, 112; cf. Merk, Handeln, 216), rejecting the view that wherever ἀγαπάω (to ‘love’) and ἀγάπη (‘love’) appear regardless of context they designate Christian love, claims that here in verse 19 ‘the normal, human love of a husband for his wife’ is in view. There is nothing specifically Christian about this injunction since the verb ἀγαπάω (to ‘love’) and its cognate noun were frequently used in other contexts of the love of a man for a woman (Origin, 111–13). However, although the terms were employed in a variety of senses in pre-Christian antiquity (cf. BAG, 4–6, Merk, Handeln, 216) they do not occur in any extrabiblical Hellenistic rules for the household (H. Greeven, “Zu den Aussagen des Neuen Testaments über die Ehe,” ZEE 1 [1957] 122, Schrage, NTS 21 [1974–75] 12, 13 and Lohse, 158). Further, Paul has already made reference to ‘love’ in this letter (2:2; 3:14) and the first recipients would have heard these household rules read publicly at the conclusion of that section in which they were exhorted to put on ‘love’ as one of the graces of the new man. The injunction to husbands to love their wives is to be understood, in part at least, in the light of that preceding admonition. Finally, although no theological basis is added to the injunction—to this extent Lohse’s comment is apt: ‘This command needs no justification, for the command of love is absolutely valid’ (158)—the detailed presentation in the parallel passage, Ephesians 5:25–33 where Christ’s love for the church is seen as the archetype of the husband’s love for his wife, indicates what the author meant by ‘love.’ It is a love that is sacrificial, that disregards itself, which is defined by Christ’s action (even if it is argued that the authorship of the two letters is different both spring from the Pauline school and must be said to reflect the same viewpoint; on the Ephesians passage see J. P. Sampley, ‘And the Two Shall Become One Flesh.’ A Study of Page 11 of Colossians Study

Paul has set up the pair in this connection.

First, the husband is to love his wife: ἀγαπάτε τὰς γυναῖκας. Although the use of ἀγαπάω to define the posture of the husband toward his wife may not have been distinctly Christian in the ancient world,²³ the way it is used throughout Colossians -- and the New Testament generally -- make it clear that the self-sacrificing commitment of the husband to his wife lies at the heart of Paul's intended meaning.²⁴ Additionally, in the secular family codes where the husband's duties toward his wife are sometimes discussed, ἀγαπάω is never used to define that obligation.²⁵ Paul has already stressed the ability of love to bind individuals together (cf. 3:14): ἐπὶ πᾶσιν δὲ τούτοις τὴν ἀγάπην, ὃ ἔστιν σύνδεσμος τῆς τελειότητος ("Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony").²⁶ When the husband adopts such a posture toward his wife, their relationship will deepen and bind them together in closeness to one another.

The expanded expression of this in Ephesians 5:25-33 makes it abundantly clear what Paul has in mind:

25 Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, 26 in order to make her holy by cleansing her with the washing of water by the word, 27 so as to present the church to himself in splendor, without a spot or wrinkle or anything of the kind—yes, so that she may be holy and without blemish. 28 In the same way, husbands should love their wives as they do their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. 29 For no one ever hates his own body, but he nourishes and tenderly cares for it, just as Christ does for the church, 30 because we are members of his body. 31 "For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two will become one flesh." 32 This is a great mystery, and I am applying it to Christ and the church. 33 Each of you, however, should love his wife as himself, and a wife should respect her husband.

25 Οἱ ἄνδρες, ἀγαπάτε τὰς γυναῖκας, καθὼς καὶ ὁ Χριστὸς ἠγάπησεν τὴν ἐκκλησίαν καὶ ἑαυτὸν παρέδωκεν

Traditions in Ephesians 5:21–33 [SNTSMS 16; Cambridge: University Press, 1971] and Barth, Ephesians 4–6, 607–753).

"If the husband heeds this apostolic injunction, he will not behave in an overbearing manner; all areas of married life will be characterized by this self-giving love and forgiveness (cf. 3:13). The original order of the Creator, which was troubled by the rule of sin and self-centeredness and which ended in the tyranny of eros and the slavery of sex (cf. 3:5), can be lived in love and forgiveness (cf. Schrage, Einzelgebote, 259).

"καὶ μὴ πικραίνεσθε πρὸς αὐτάς. The positive injunction is now put negatively: husbands are not to be embittered against their wives, πικραίνω (to 'make bitter,' 'embitter,' BAG, 657, Michaelis, TDNT 6, 122–25), though appearing only here in an ethical context of the NT (cf. πικρία, 'bitterness,' in the short list of vices at Eph 4:31), was frequently used by classical writers from Plato onward (on the instances of the word-group in the LXX see Michaelis, TDNT 6, 122, 123). Christian husbands are not to become angry or incensed against their wives, either in thought or in word and deed. The preposition πρὸς ('against') is not attested with the verb in the LXX or Philo, and Michaelis (TDNT 6, 125; cf. Lohse, 158) has suggested that what may be especially in view is the bitterness vented on the wife though not caused by her. At all events, avoidance of bitterness is an expression of obedience to the commandment to love."

[Peter T. O'Brien, vol. 44, *Word Biblical Commentary: Colossians-Philemon*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 2002), 223-24.]

²³"The ideal of a husband being tenderly solicitous for his wife was not distinctively Christian (classic expression in Musonius, *Orationes* 13A),¹⁹ though how far reality matched the ideal in either case we are not in a position now to say." [James D. G. Dunn, *The Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Grand Rapids, Mich.; Carlisle: William B. Eerdmans Publishing; Paternoster Press, 1996), 248.]

²⁴In contrast to Paul, note Plutarch's (AD 46-120) advice to a newly married couple during the first century:

Fire takes speedy hold of straw or hare's fur, but soon goes out again, unless fed with an addition of more fuel. Thus that same love, whose flames are nourished only by heat of youth and looser charms of beauty, seldom proves of long continuance or grows to wedlock maturity, unless it have taken a deep root in conformity of manners, and mutual affection be enlivened by the intermixture of souls as well as bodies, while prudence and discretion feed the noble flame.

[Plutarch, "Moralia: Conjugal Precepts," oll.libertyfund.org, Book II, Paragraph 4.]

Clearly he reflects the commonly held understanding that when love comes into the marital picture it is sex based, but must deepen to something deeper coming out of the social mores of the culture.

²⁵"However, although the terms were employed in a variety of senses in pre-Christian antiquity (cf. BAG, 4–6, Merk, Handeln, 216) they do not occur in any extrabiblical Hellenistic rules for the household (H. Greeven, "Zu den Aussagen des Neuen Testaments über die Ehe," ZEE 1 [1957] 122, Schrage, NTS 21 [1974–75] 12, 13 and Lohse, 158)." [Peter T. O'Brien, vol. 44, *Word Biblical Commentary: Colossians-Philemon*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 2002), 223.]

²⁶"Further, Paul has already made reference to 'love' in this letter (2:2; 3:14) and the first recipients would have heard these household rules read publicly at the conclusion of that section in which they were exhorted to put on 'love' as one of the graces of the new man. The injunction to husbands to love their wives is to be understood, in part at least, in the light of that preceding admonition." [Peter T. O'Brien, vol. 44, *Word Biblical Commentary: Colossians-Philemon*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 2002), 223.]

ὑπὲρ αὐτῆς, 26 ἵνα αὐτὴν ἀγίαση καθάρισας τῷ λουτρῷ τοῦ ὕδατος ἐν ῥήματι, 27 ἵνα παραστήσῃ αὐτὸς ἑαυτῷ ἔνδοξον τὴν ἐκκλησίαν, μὴ ἔχουσαν σπίλον ἢ ῥυτίδα ἢ τι τῶν τοιούτων, ἀλλ' ἵνα ᾗ ἀγία καὶ ἄμωμος. 28 οὕτως ὀφείλουσιν καὶ οἱ ἄνδρες ἀγαπᾶν τὰς ἑαυτῶν γυναῖκας ὡς τὰ ἑαυτῶν σώματα· ὁ ἀγαπῶν τὴν ἑαυτοῦ γυναῖκα ἑαυτὸν ἀγαπᾷ, 29 οὐδεὶς γάρ ποτε τὴν ἑαυτοῦ σάρκα ἐμίσησεν, ἀλλὰ ἐκτρέφει καὶ θάλπει αὐτήν, καθὼς καὶ ὁ Χριστὸς τὴν ἐκκλησίαν, 30 ὅτι μέλη ἐσμὲν τοῦ σώματος αὐτοῦ. 31 ἀντὶ τούτου καταλείπει ἄνθρωπος τὸν πατέρα καὶ τὴν μητέρα καὶ προσκολληθήσεται τῇ γυναικὶ αὐτοῦ, καὶ ἔσονται οἱ δύο εἰς σάρκα μίαν. 32 τὸ μυστήριον τοῦτο μέγα ἐστίν, ἐγὼ δὲ λέγω εἰς Χριστὸν καὶ εἰς τὴν ἐκκλησίαν. 33 πλὴν καὶ ὑμεῖς οἱ καθ' ἓνα ἕκαστος τὴν ἑαυτοῦ γυναῖκα οὕτως ἀγαπάτω ὡς ἑαυτόν, ἢ δὲ γυνὴ ἵνα φοβῆται τὸν ἄνδρα.

Although with different language, Peter urges Christian husbands toward a similar posture with their Christian wife in 1 Peter 3:7: Οἱ ἄνδρες ὁμοίως συνοικοῦντες κατὰ γνώσιν, ὡς ἀσθενεστέρῳ σκεύει τῷ γυναικίῳ ἀπονέμοντες τιμὴν, ὡς καὶ συγκληρονόμοις χάριτος ζωῆς, εἰς τὸ μὴ ἐγκόπτεσθαι τὰς προσευχὰς ὑμῶν (Husbands, in the same way, show consideration for your wives in your life together, paying honor to the woman as the weaker sex, since they too are also heirs of the gracious gift of life—so that nothing may hinder your prayers.). The warning at the end about the husband's prayers being hindered if he doesn't take such a stance toward his wife is very significant.

Second, do not embitter your wife: καὶ μὴ πικραίνεσθε πρὸς αὐτάς.²⁷ The four uses in the New Testament range in meaning from a) 'to make something bitter' to b) 'to causing bitter feelings.'²⁸ The interpretive issue is whether the husband shows bitterness toward his wife, or whether his harsh actions against her generate bitterness in her against him.²⁹ This grows out of the unusual use of the preposition πρὸς with the verb. Some are convinced that it shifts the sense of the command for the husband to not express bitterness toward (= against) his wife.³⁰ But the other sense of his actions against her causing her to feel bitterness toward him is also possible. Given that laws against spousal abuse



²⁷A study of the word group πικρός, πικρία, πικραίνω, παραπικραίνω, παραπικρασμός is helpful for clearer understanding of what is meant here. Cf. *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Kittel, Geoffrey W. Bromiley and Gerhard Friedrich, electronic ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964-), 6:122ff. The core meaning of πικρός as sharp and penetrating points to emotional expressions that penetrate with a pain causing sharpness in a very intense manner.

The LXX uses of the verb are instructive: “The verb πικραίνω (some 12 times) occurs only fig. Act. trans.: πὴν ψυχὴν, Job 27:2 (v.l. πικρῶ A3); κλαυθμόν, Sir. 38:17; opp. εὐφραίνω, 1 Macc. 3:7;4 only Iερ. 39(32):32 of God's chiding, elsewhere παραπικραίνω (→ 125, 27 ff.). More common (apart from the singular constr. ἐπικράνθη μοι ὑπὲρ ὑμᾶς in Rt. 1:13 and the etym. note in 1:20) is the dep. pass. ‘to be enraged, angry, incensed,’ Ex. 16:20; 1 Εσδρ. 4:31; Iερ. 44(37):15 etc. (never of God).” [*Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Kittel, Geoffrey W. Bromiley and Gerhard Friedrich, electronic ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964-), 6:123.]

²⁸πικραίνω fut. πικρανῶ; aor. ἐπικράνα LXX. Pass: fut. 3 pl. πικρανθήσονται Jer 40:9; 1 aor. ἐπικράνθη; prim. ‘make sharp’ esp. to the taste (s. three next entries).

1. to cause to become bitter, make bitter in physical sense (Hippocr. et al.) πικρανεῖ σου τὴν κοιλίαν (κοιλία 1b) **Rv 10:9**. Pass., of the stomach ἐπικράνθη ἡ κοιλία vs. **10**. Of someth. that has been swallowed: (τὰ ὕδατα) ἐπικράνθησαν **8:11** (prob. not in ref. to οἱ ἄνθρωποι, in the sense ‘made bitter’=poisoned?). Of honey when wormwood is mixed w. it Hm 5, 1, 5.

2. to cause bitter feelings, embitter, make bitter, in affective sense (Pla.+; LXX; ApcrEzk Denis p. 122, 3 [Epiph. 70, 14]) pass., intr. sense become bitter or embittered abs. (Demosth., Ep. 1, 6; Ep. 6 of Apollonius of Tyana: Philostrat. I 346, 19; Is 14:9; Philo, Mos. I, 302) Hm 10, 2, 3. π. πρὸς τινα *be embittered against someone* **Col 3:19** (πρὸς τινα as Lynceus in Athen. 6, 242b).—DELG s.v. πικρός. M-M. TW.

[William Arndt, Frederick W. Danker and Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 812-13.]

²⁹“The positive injunction is now put negatively: husbands are not to be embittered against their wives, πικραίνω (to ‘make bitter,’ ‘embitter,’ BAG, 657, Michaelis, TDNT 6, 122–25), though appearing only here in an ethical context of the NT (cf. πικρία, ‘bitterness,’ in the short list of vices at Eph 4:31), was frequently used by classical writers from Plato onward (on the instances of the word-group in the LXX see Michaelis, TDNT 6, 122, 123). Christian husbands are not to become angry or incensed against their wives, either in thought or in word and deed. The preposition πρὸς (‘against’) is not attested with the verb in the LXX or Philo, and Michaelis (TDNT 6, 125; cf. Lohse, 158) has suggested that what may be especially in view is the bitterness vented on the wife though not caused by her. At all events, avoidance of bitterness is an expression of obedience to the commandment to love.” [Peter T. O’Brien, vol. 44, *Word Biblical Commentary : Colossians-Philemon*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 2002), 223-24.]

³⁰“Not to let oneself be mastered by such πικρία is the point of πικραίνεσθαι in the admonition to husbands in Col. 3:19: μὴ πικραίνεσθε πρὸς αὐτάς, ‘do not become angry, incensed against your wives’ either in thought or more particularly in word and deed.” [Theological Dictionary of the New Testament, ed. Gerhard Kittel, Geoffrey W. Bromiley and Gerhard Friedrich, electronic ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964-), 6:125.]

did not exist in the ancient world, a wife would be very limited in how she could respond to harsh treatment from her husband. Bitterness against him would be one option, although in isolated ancient texts wives were known to have poisoned their husband's food in retaliation for his bad treatment of them.³¹ Given the age differences, the domination of husbands over wives etc., that the husband is to both love and refrain from embittering his wife is rather remarkable.

In Eph. 5:25-33, Paul only stresses the love side of the responsibility and does not mention its counterpart as he does in Colossians.³² What lies underneath this expression in the Lycus Valley that prompted him to include this is unknown.

2. What does the text mean to us today?

How do Paul's instructions apply to us today? First, we have to settle the exegetical issue about the patriarchal family structure understanding. If the assumption is made, that such a family structure is divinely ordained, then one set of applications apply. That is, after 'patriarchal family' is properly defined out of both the Old Testament and from the few isolated allusions in the New Testament. On the other hand, if we take the text signals of vocabulary etc. to indicate that Paul assumed the existing societal family structure prevalent in his day and sought then to redefine it in Christian terms so that families in the communities of believers would become very different from everyone else and distinctly Christian, then another set of applications kick into gear.

A stronger case for the latter view can be made in my view, and thus the application centers on cultivating the stances of love and respect between a husband and a wife without issues of 'who is boss' entering into the discussion. In the larger context of Col. chapters two and three this emphasis underscores the important role that families inside the church play to the spiritual health of the entire Christian community. Against, the superficial attitudes of the false teachers in the Lycus Valley Paul stresses that the Christian life must be lived out in the daily experience of the most intimate relationships in human life, those in the family. And that this is possible only when Christ is indeed Lord in the lives of the husband and wife both individually and together.

1) How do husbands and wives relate to one another in today's world?

2) How do you relate to your spouse?

³¹Plutarch has an interesting note on the wife's bitterness:

They who offer to Juno as the Goddess of Wedlock never consecrate the gall with the other parts of the sacrifice, but having drawn it forth, they cast it behind the altar. Which constitution of the lawgiver fairly implies that all manner of passionate anger and bitterness of reproach should be exterminated from the thresholds of nuptial cohabitation. Not but that a certain kind of austerity becomes the mistress of a family; which however should be like that of wine, profitable and delightful, not like aloes, biting and medicinally ungrateful to the palate. [oll.libertyfund.org, Book II, Paragraph 27]

³² He does, however, move in this general direction with instructions for fathers toward their children in Eph. 6:4: Καὶ οἱ πατέρες, μὴ παροργίζετε τὰ τέκνα ὑμῶν, ἀλλὰ ἐκτρέφετε αὐτὰ ἐν παιδείᾳ καὶ νοουθεσίᾳ κυρίου. (And, fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.)