



## **Haustafeln: A Deconstruction Reading of the Household Codes in Ephesians 5: 22-25 for Sustainable Development in Nigerian Context**

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**Abstract.** The quest for sustainable development has remained a recurring decimal in the history of man. Hence it becomes enigmatic for scholars and the society to admit the Pauline household codes on the verge of global challenges for advancement and technological breakthrough in the society as well. The paper adopts a multidimensional approach in order to heuristically examine the phenomenon. It discovers among other things that the restriction on the family was borne out of fear for the Greco-Roman government since the Jews were under Roman rule. Also, discovers that it is anti-society in outlook as women were meant to be seen and not heard their potentials denied while children and slaves the future leaders in our contemporary context were disenfranchised. Beside the men, every other person are denied of their rights, subjected and couched under the guise of patriarchal authority and harmonious living. The paper concludes by recommending a deconstruction reading that will empower women and youths to achieve speedy development. It recommends that the idea of patriarchy should be re-interpreted with love-submission in focus, where input from other members of the family counts and not blind submission to mediocrity and underdevelopment because of masculinity

**Keywords:** sustainable development, patriarchal, submission, *haustafeln*, society, family and deconstruction

### **1. Introduction**

The challenges of development are no longer an issue for any particular nation rather it is a global phenomenon of which most third world countries like Nigeria are trying to grapple with. According to Ojo (2011), there are 82 million females and 85 million males as the world celebrated Day of Seven Billion people on Monday 31st October 2011. With this figure, Nigeria becomes the sixth largest population in the world after China, India, USA, Indonesia and Brazil.

Going by the trend, there is the need for a reconsideration of any barrier to the development of human capacity building. Omonubi- McDonnell (2003) in affirmation of the struggle for women's development notes with particular reference to Nigeria that the rights of women have been subsumed and suppressed by gender arrogance couched in the garb of religion and culture.

In quest recognition and emancipation Olajubu (2003) notes that identity as a phenomenon encourages a compendium of difficult elements that are nevertheless interconnected. The ingredients for the construction are supplied by a combination of culture, religion and power relations among others. These have been used overtime as we now see in the Epistles of the apostle Paul that reflects his cultural norms in the New Testament. Hence the *Haustafeln* is the actual household style in his humble background of Roman citizenship (Acts 22:25-28).

Isiorhovoja (2008) argues that Paul's citizenship helped to inform his personality greatly that has brought him real fame and stewardship of the problems of Christianity. From his teachings, the inconsistencies observed may be as a result of his heterogeneous background of which a careful examination divulges an appreciable knowledge as to the basis of his teachings

### **1.1 Background of the Early Church**

The birth of the church in a foreign land was met with many challenges to which she was to surmount in order to survive. The presence of believers in Rome; a different cultural milieu posed the greatest problem - from *religio-illicita* to cannibalism, incest and treason. But under the social condition in Rome, Tyson (1984) notes that Rome will not trade-off her identity under the emperor because of any province under her. This she maintained through common language, *pax Romana*, cultural unity among the provinces, good

road network and maintenance of class structure in the society (*haustafeln*) and in the home.

Martin (1991), notes that Hellenistic Jews including Philo and Josephus sought to articulate ethical imperatives in the pattern of household codes. The view that Hellenistic Judaism borrowed its scheme of ethical instruction is well attested to by the tradition which emphasized worship and obedience to the one God and duties relating to husbands and wives in marriage, children, masters and slaves.

These household codes were however copiously copied by the early church to her detriment. Herzog (1966) argues that the early Christian community as a upon the "minority community" in a "majority culture" drew resources, precedents, models and paradigms of the society of which it was a part as she reassessed the meaning of life in the *ekklesia* (kingdom) of God. The household codes were utilized and thus Christianized as the church underwent a process of re-socialization in light of her new vision of the world.

However, as the church moved out of the fourth century, the apostolic era, the impact of cultural infiltration become dominant. But the gospel message is centred on 'agape' thus, it become difficult for the church under fear to kick against the state (Roman household code) of patriarchy. Hence, agape was defined into Roman household to read "love-submission".

Scroggs (1972) decried the above submission; he notes that these codes have been used to reinforce a thorough going chauvinism in the church and society thereby losing valuable contributions that would have been made or received from women folks and youths. From the *kerygma* perspective, Stagg (1985) observes that the *haustafeln* and similar texts placing limitations on women have been used to turn the good news "into the bad news" for women, perhaps more than a rhetorical repartee.

The global need for development is not the task for science and technology alone. Like the Enlightenment, its ripples cut across all fields of human endeavour. Hence, Robinson and Koester (1971) affirm the need for a critical look:

*New Testament scholarship as an intellectual activity is a modern science on influencing as well as moulding the modern understanding of reality, reciprocity it shares with the humanities in general.... Every scholar or scientist who deals with a matter from the past does so in terms of his present grasp of reality and the results of his research in turn flow into the current body of knowledge.*

Fiorenza (1992), notes that every form of biblical exegesis with *androcentric* language should be interpreted as inclusive of women (androgynous). This statement can be interpreted in diverse way with reference to scripture and contemporary social challenges. Through this, we will be able to draw a line of symmetry from the early background of the Christian church that was shaped in fear as result of Roman *haustafeln* to the *androcentric* writing of the gospels and epistle in later centuries of Christian History (Felder 1991).

Boer (1976) strongly notes that the Christian church was born in the Roman Empire; a world that was already old, the greatest of the ancient empires that stretched from England to Persia and from Sahara to north western Germany, hundreds of tribes lived within Rome's border. The centre of the empire was the city of Rome. Hence Herzog's idea about the church being a minority community within a majority culture holds. It further buttresses the fact that the church could not have done otherwise but to adopt and adapt her teachings to reflect the majority culture which includes respect to the family as the find in the *haustafeln*.

The Image of God and Human Sexuality

A study of the creation accounts reveals the relationship between man and woman that they teach without reflecting on what it means to be created in the "image of God". Moun (1996) notes that traditionally, two human attributes have been singled out as likely explanations for the meaning of the references to God's image. Some scholars argue in favour of rational capacities while others favour spiritual dimension. Hershberger (1985) opines that man in his original nature was like a mirror reflecting God's holiness and love in a relationship of responsive obedience that include knowledge and righteousness.

Karl Barth defines the image of God in terms of human nature's social dimensions. He adds that "Is it not astonishing that again and again expositions have ignored the definitive explanation given by the text..."? Jewett (1975) corroborates Karl Barth in this understanding of the image of God but Mouw (1976) disfavoured the above opinion, auguring that it is not immediately clear that being "male and female" is a way of resembling God. However, if this is correct, then each of us (male and female) best reflects the image of God when we are in relationship with another human being in a positive co-operative way.

The thesis of Genesis 1:28 man being created in the image of God strongly shows that human ideas such as the *haustafeln* is merely an act of human endeavour

input class, race and status to man and not the direct workings of God.

From Genesis 3, the fall and decline of women's role become so prominent. Kuhns (1978) notes that the curse portions of this chapter have been used to reinforce the traditional pattern of man/woman relationships with subjection imposed on the woman because she was the first to sin. This argument however failed to consider the forgiveness of God and the victor of Jesus Christ. Jewett (1975) adds that the picture of God in the Bible is that of unreserved forgiveness at repentance. Also, the bible says that Jesus Christ destroyed sin and its effects. Hence, agape should be the central theme of interpretation and not culture.

Nyce Yoder Dorothy (1973) and Hartzler (1976) complicated one another in their opinion over the fallen state of humanity. They opine that the judgement of Genesis 3 in the Creator's acknowledgement of the fallen world, the sin list is disruptive and not prescriptive. It says this is what happened; it does not say this is the way it always has to be.

From the Old Testament background into Judaism, we see the transition of women from prominence to subjugation and total absence from the public lifestyle. The net result was that women came to be considered inferior to men and there emerged in Judaism an over contempt for the female sex. Isiorhovoja (2008) notes that Paul as a Jew and Pharisee had a previous religious orientation that had so much emphasis on the rejection and denial of women the full right to the Torah well as the general inferior status of women.

## 2. *Haustafeln* and the Challenges of Women's Development

It has been established by scholars that Paul under the influence of Roman rule gave his order because members of the Roman elites suspected Christianity like several other non-Roman religions of subverting Roman family value (Keener, 2000). Through this act, the Christians could protect themselves from undue persecution and from misunderstanding of the gospel; hence we find the threefold submission - wives, children and slaves.

But the demand made on husbands as Christ did for the Church suggest an act of 'agape' he defines wife's submission as respect rather than obedience to coercion and he expects husbands to submit to their wives, something virtually unheard of in the days of Paul that made his summary lop-sided as he zero in on

women only just to favour the *haustafeln* which is the Roman family choice.

Vine (1985) in his exposition on fear gives his readers three clauses of fear *Phobos* which include: flight, being fearful or reverence *eulabeia* and *deilia*, fearfulness as in cowardice. Paul's action be judged as an act of timidity and mediocrity, then his wealth of knowledge in the law will be greatly disputed. Paul had a good knowledge of the law hence it cannot be said to be *deilia* which is act cowardice. Then, if it is *eulabeia*, unto who is his godly fear being directed, the reverence and the caution. Hence, vital question is raised on the leadership structure if he is adopting that cultural practice of his day as a trans-cultural requirement or he just call us to live the Christian life within the framework of whatever leadership structure exist in our society.

Keena (2004) argues that one passage unambiguously forbidding women to teach addresses a specific situation since we have examples of women sharing with Paul which is making it more difficult to argue that Paul merely recognized husbands' leadership in his culture, rather than demanding it in all cultures since the whole New Testament was written in a culture where the *haustafeln* is well established. Now, is Paul establishing roles in the home for all cultures or just his congregation only?

The fact that limitations are placed on women not to teach strongly indicates that there are women who possessed knowledge and skills to carry out such duties as we also found in Proverbs 31. There are the postulations of having cultures where wives could share equally with their husbands in the leadership of their homes. Should Paul only had his own culture in mind, how can we apply these principles in a completely different culture?

Amidst these controversial positions of Paul on women, Isiorhovoja (2010) argues that the challenges facing women today is that of rising up to the male folk and a re-visit to certain biblical passages on the concept of *Imago Dei*, *haustafeln* and *authentain* (Isiorhovoja 2011).

Ulanor (2005293) adds that if sex is undervalued, it will ultimately lead to the total destruction of the human race, and if the feminine is neglected in the contra sexual form within the masculine or misunderstood as a second-best category of human sexuality, then the fullness of human being not only damaged but the divine image as well because the dominion was given to man as in man and woman.

Paul's succumb to cultural influence has greatly impacted his writings which today has been used as a norm and tradition wielding global influence in some negative ways against women. Kemdirim (1995) decried the apparent experience of woman subordination, submission and relegation in the local churches and public sphere largely because of the negative cultural attitudes to which women must given in to. In the African perspective, male dominance is predominant in the society where women are forsaken, denied rights and privileges while the male children are held as king.

Akintunde (2005) corroborates the above author adding that there is a choice of usage of the biblical text-oppressive or liberative, but as a Nigerian woman, she has found in it role models that serve as catalyst to women emancipation. Hence, the bible cannot be said to be closed already because it speaks to everyone in different ways, this will be the leeway to sustainable development and human capacity building otherwise, society will repeat history as of the early church where many women and slaves who were denied rights and privilege in Hellenistic and early Christian household but gained greater measures of freedom and self expression in Hellenistic cults such as Isis, Cybele and Dionysus. But the love paradigm of Jesus' message empowers women, where man failed in his earthly ministry, women were there. Hence became a social liberator in John 4 by publicly engaging a Samaritan woman in a dialogue (Felder, 1989).

On the challenges of women's development, Uchendu (1995) notes that if Nigeria is to develop, a serious attention should be given to women who make up about half of the Nigerian population. It is observed that women, the disadvantaged group are at the lower rung of the social ladder while men, the favoured group garner unequal privilege. This he argued is based on the fact that there is a hierarchy rather than a situation that recognizes the equality of functional interdependence based on differences. He notes that socio-cultural milieu which irrespective of the progress so far made since independence are still disproportionately found in peripheral positions that command greater social status and reward.

The United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women was launched in 2011 to see how women's input can be enhanced especially among poor nations like Nigeria. Armstrong (2003), notes that women bear the brunt of hardship in poor communities where efforts to modernise discriminatory laws can be frustrated by the deep-rooted cultural barriers that so often run parallel with poverty. But investment in women will not only

enhance their welfare but will serve as key agents for delivery of poverty reduction and social development. Other important areas being highlighted presently include: women's voices, climate change, violence against women, reproductive health, education, economic inequality and discrimination. The lofty objective of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and the nascent vision 20:2020 can only be achieved if gender issues, cultural, religious and traditional issues are revisited with the aim of breaking gender barriers and inequalities are brought to zero level.

Rudrampan (2011) in like vein argues in favour of the MDGs goals promulgated by the 2000 UN Millennium Summit that declared Women Empowerment as the third important goal. Thus, changing the barriers that could hinder women capacity development into stepping stones in building ability and skills of women, to gain insights of actions and issues in the external environment that influences them and stir up their capacity in order to overcome social and institutional obstacles; to strengthening their participation in all spheres of life aimed at sustainable development and eradication of stigmatization.

Chief Emeka Anyaoku, the former Secretary General of the on-Information Commonwealth among other things touched Communication Technology (ICT) in an age of Globalization and posits that for Nigeria to make it to 20:2020, research and development, gender equality in all sectors of our national life must receive the boost in order to achieve the general mobilization of the entire population for purposes of national development. The crusade should be a process by which all human societies, cultures and economics are increasingly become inter-connected through a worldwide network (Edukugho, 2011).

### 3. Recommendations

The paper among other things seeks to recommend as follows:

- As a result of cultural dynamism over time, texts placing limitations on women should be ignored or re-interpreted bearing mutual submission in mind.
- Socio-cultural barriers that have been overtaken by events should be over-looked so that one family member will not suffer unduly as a result of age long tradition.
- God gave man dominion, not man as male but man as humanity including woman. Hence, mutual submission as taught by Christ should

be the basis of grooming and driving the society towards development.

- All forms of discrimination against women should be reinterpreted into stepping stones in order to rightly propel the wheel of National development.
- Government/societies should key into global development initiatives as we now fund ourselves in a global village in an age of globalization.
- There should be firmness in confronting authority through this; our good intentions will be made known. Should Christ be a social liberator, why is Paul placing limitation as a result of fear?

#### 4. Conclusion

The failure of Paul in recognition of other cultures as well as his attitude of levity towards women and gender issues has been the bane of social development that is directly or indirectly militating against women folks. The issue of national development deserves concerted effort that which mutual submission in agape stands for. The fear of Paul has been taken on a universal norm today. Howbeit, such restrictions should be reinterpreted in light of the present prevailing social challenges. Education has been seen as the most viable vehicle for social mobilization and transformation. Women should be allowed against all cultural milieus to develop their God-given potentials which are needed as in the attainment of all forms of National objectives. The society today has developed beyond the era in which Paul in his days thought. Though he was indecisive as he worked and commended women which should serve as the basis for women empowerment and development, he couched feminine right under Roman traditional tunic.

The choice of the nation to achieve certain developmental goals, critically calls to mind a deconstruction of all barriers placed on women public and personal development that can largely result to their emancipation. The Roman government and elites were in massive support of women being seen and not heard but today, there is a paradigm shift, a mass mobilization for the sole aim of national development hence, the UN, MDGs and Vision 20:2020 should be pursued vigorously.

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