



Domestic workers in Nigerian Christian families: A socio-rhetorical reading of Ephesians 6:5–9

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The erosion of traditional work roles which had been male biased has led to the increase of women in the workplace. Although a welcomed development, it has an attendant problem – a vacuum in the homestead. Consequently, families are filling this vacuum by employing various hands (houseboys and girls, maids and nannies) to handle the house chores in the absence of parents. Being part of the society and mostly affected by female personnel (as Islamic conservativeness is reducing female personnel), many Christian parents are now faced with the issue of relating properly with their 'servants' and vice versa. In fact, there are many cases of maltreatment of these helps and pampering their own children while the helps are overstretched, on the one hand, and cases of outrageous and negative behaviours on the part of the 'servants'. This article is aimed at giving a biblical guideline on domestic workers and masters relationship via a socio-rhetorical reading of Ephesians 6:5–9. It examines the Graeco-Roman household codes between servants and masters and provides a comparative analysis of these ethical codes with the Nigerian situation to emphasise the contemporary relevance of the passage.

Contributions: The article holds that rather than being treated as domestic workers, these servants should be treated as part of the family. They should be sent to school, properly clothed, and fed and treated equally with the children of the home. They are human beings created and loved by God before whom we are all equals.

Keywords: New Testament; Ephesians; Haustafel; slaves; domestic servants.

Introduction

Increasing acceptance of women into the workplace has altered the traditional home keeping roles. As women are traditionally expected to handle the homestead in Nigeria, their absence from home because of workplace engagement had left the home unattended to. To fill this vacuum, most families resorted to the appointment of domestic workers. Tade and Aderinto (2012:531) stated that 'the pretence for demanding domestic workers is workload created by role strain'. They further said that because a working woman would withdraw from home and child care, 'hiring domestic servants becomes a safety valve to help muddle through multiple roles' (Tade & Aderinto 2012:532). Their data revealed that '63.6% of working women hired domestic servants to perform household chores/domestic work/washing/cleaning of the house, while 24.1% employed domestic servants to care for their children' (Tade & Aderinto 2012:532). These statistics show a prevalence in the use of domestic servants in contemporary Nigeria.

Those serving as domestic workers are mostly under-aged (which makes them to be regarded as cheap labour). This is corroborated by Awosusi and Adebo (2012:271) who states that those usually employed as domestic workers are young people 'whose age can be as low as 6', and it is also important to know that most of the people employed to manage the homes are usually young girls (Orji & Nworgu 2019:254), thus increasing the girl-child employment cases. Amazingly, Nigeria has about 15 000 000 working children (Ngele 2012:184–185), a large percentage of which are domestic workers.

The current state of domestic workers in Nigeria raised twin issues: child labour and girl child employment. The International Labour Organization (ILO) (2004:16) defined child labour as 'work that deprives children of their childhood, their potential and their dignity, and that is harmful to physical and mental development'. Odukoya (2009) identifies six forms of child labour, namely, agricultural, street trading, domestic servitude, pawns and bonded labour, child begging

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and child marriage. Causes of child labour include demographic conditions, income insecurity and poverty. The dangers of child labour to the children led Nigeria to enact the *Children's Right Act* of 2003 (CRA), which prohibited subjecting anyone under 18 years of age to any form of employment or forced or exploitative labour. The ineffectiveness of this enactment, however, can be seen in the staggering number of children involved in child labour, and the fact that only 28 out of the 36 states of the federation have adopted the CRA as a state law.

As stated earlier, the domestic workers and many of their masters are Christians. The fact that the majority of domestic workers are Christians is substantiated by Orji and Nworgu (2019:255) who showed that 50% of domestic workers are Christians. This notwithstanding, the relationship between the two classes is not always palatable. There are cases of negative behaviour from both sides. This article is aimed at determining the message of the writer to the two classes in Ephesians 6:5–9 and recommends the same to the two classes in Nigeria so that they would be beacons to the society.

Servants in the Graeco-Roman world

The reason for analysing the cultural setting of Ephesians to understand this passage is cited by Dudley (1999):

[U]nless we understand New Testament social history sympathetically within its cultural settings – which are ancient and alien to ours – we are predisposed to misinterpret the social realities reflected there. The result is that we will superimpose our modern questions and social agendas into the ancient texts in order to receive the answers we expect back again clothed in biblical authority. (p. 27)

In the same vein, Lovik (1995:49) states that 'understanding the cultural and literary context of the biblical writers sheds a deal of light on the meaning of biblical texts'.

The presence of slaves in the Graeco-Roman society was a daily fact (Cuffel 1966:323). Paraphrasing Aristotle, Cuffel (1966:323) says, 'slavery, like marriage, parenthood, or citizenship was one of the common personal relationships, and of these, it was the least important'. In the Roman society, it is believed that slaves may have constituted between 25% and 40% of the population (Swindoll 2015:294). The presence of slaves in the society notwithstanding, 'there was no wholesale condemnation of slavery. It was too much the commonplace, too much a part of the daily fabric of life' (Cuffel 1966:329).

To maintain order in the society, the Romans had their house codes to govern the relationship of the various classes within the household and the society by extension. Dudley (1999:27) identified the household codes of the first-century Mediterranean world as the socio-historical setting for Ephesians 6:5–9. In recognition of Paul's use of the household codes, some scholars appeal to Paul's reference to God as

'the great paterfamilias, the patriarch over every family of humanity'. Schnackenburg (2001) also admits that:

[F]or Ephesians it is clear that the author knows the *Haustafel*¹ in Colossians 3:18–4:1 and takes them as his basis; we find the same restrictions to three times two groups, the same order and the same intention. (p. 241)

He goes on to say, however, that 'it is clear that the author has developed and deepened the instruction' (Schnackenburg 2001:241), an assertion that is important to the understanding of the passage and shall be examined later.

In situating the code Paul used, most scholars assume a Roman cultural matrix, household codes, which however can be regarded as universal as Lovik (1995:51) says, 'ancient household codes had already been a rhetorical device used by ancient writers'. It has been observed that the threefold division of the household codes adopted by Aristotle formed the pattern for the *Haustafeln* (Balch 1981:29), and these are husband and wives, fathers and children, and masters and slaves. This article is concerned with the master and slave relationship.

The fundamental concept that guides the master and slave relationship is that slaves were seen as properties and were treated as such (Gombis 2005:329). In other words, slaves 'were not considered as persons with rights but as objects over which their master had the right of disposal' (Schnackenburg 2001:241).

For a clearer picture, there is the need to examine what slaves would properly pass through. Without mincing words, 'harsh treatment was synonymous with slavery' (Knapp 2011:115). Explaining the harsh treatment, Knapp (2011) mentions abuses. These include physical abuse, which is adjudged as 'the most frequent and violent form of degradation' (Knapp 2011:115). An example is the beating of slaves. Knapp (2011) said the purpose of beating was usually:

[E]ither to encourage good behaviour or punish bad, or both at once – or simply out of anger, frustration, or sadism. There was in practice no control over the master's powers to physically abuse out of all proportion. (p. 116)

Knapp (2011) describes the 'combination of physical and psychological abuse' as the worst type of abuse and sexual abuse is seen as psychological abuse. Sexual abuse could involve rape but 'the casual deeply normal assumption by slaves and free alike that slaves were available as sexual objects meant that overt violence often was not involved' (Knapp 2011:118). Maybe, the general acceptability of the practice made 'nothing in the New Testament speaks out against this sexual abuse' and surprisingly 'rabbinical literature describes when it is all right to have sex with one's female slave' and to worsen the situation, 'male slaves

¹*Haustafel* is a German word first used by Martin Luther and has become a convention with reference to the household codes in the New Testament.

were also the subject of their master's sexual ravishing' (Knapp 2011:118).

This gloomy picture notwithstanding, the treatment of slaves depends on the temperament of their owners. Another factor that can erase the terrible treatment of slaves is their economic value. Swindoll (2015:294) says, 'because good slaves were a valuable investment, masters gained more from treating them well and keeping them healthy than from neglecting or harming them'.

Master–servant relationships in the Graeco-Roman society and Nigeria: A comparative analysis

Despite the gap between the 1st-century Mediterranean world in which Ephesians was written and the contemporary days, the basis of this comparison lies in the fact that 'in the first century, many slaves were akin to domestic servants – actual members of a household' (Swindoll 2015:292). As the relationship between masters and domestic workers in contemporary Nigeria is the focus of this article, the message of Paul to the masters in Ephesus would be relevant to the Nigerian situation.

In the Graeco-Roman period, five major ways have been identified as sources for slaves:

1. children born to slave mothers within the Empire
2. persons enslaved in provincial or frontier wars
3. persons imported across the frontiers
4. the self-enslaved
5. infants abandoned at places within the Empire.

Fee (2002), however, opines that the major source of slaves is economic need. This is explained to mean 'those who voluntarily sold themselves into slavery were a larger category' (Harris 1999:62). This is a major similarity with the Nigerian situation as most of the domestic servants are those who have been sold into servanthood by either their parents or themselves. The domestic workers in Nigeria are mostly children under the age of 18 years who are mostly girls. It has been said that in Nigeria, there are over 15 million children engaged as domestic workers (Ngele 2012:184–185). It had been ascertained that the use of domestic workers is prevalent in Nigeria as it was in Pauline days. It has also been ascertained that most of those who own domestic workers are Christians. The respondents' demography of the research conducted by Okafor and Amayo (2006) shows that of a total of 101 respondents, 83 (82.1%) are Christians. This implies that those who use domestic workers in Nigeria are mostly Christians (it has been stated earlier that the percentage of Muslim women working in Nigeria are few compared to Christians), and this thus means that the message of this passage is applicable to the Nigerian situation.

The institution of slavery seems acceptable in the Mediterranean world. Although it was clear that there were many wrongs against the slaves, there were no criticisms of

note against the institution available. Lincoln (1990:415) states that 'no ancient government thought of abolishing the institution, and none of the slave rebellions had as its goal the abolition of slavery'. Westernmann (1955:215) says that slavery was accepted as part of the labour structure and was not seen as a problem. The church was not critical of the situation and 'did not make any attempt at a fundamental change in their social status' (Schnackenburg 2001:263). However, in Nigeria, although the institution is widespread, people speak against its ill. For example, no one grudges anyone for keeping a slave but maltreating a slave is always condemned. A Yoruba saying cited by Aduradola and Oyero (2015) says, 'mo ti ri omo oba to deru ri, mo si ti ri iwofa to di olowo'. This proverb which literally in English reads 'I have seen a prince become a slave and I have seen a pawn become a wealthy man' is used to warn wealthy people or slave owners of the predictableness of the wheel of fortune and caution them to treat their servants properly. These warnings and legal statutes from the government notwithstanding, masters still largely maltreat their domestic servants.

The status of slaves in the Roman society was the lowest of the low because they were regarded little more than *human res*, that is, a thing or object and consequently not regarded as a person but a possession (Burks 2008:11–12). This is akin to Kirchsclaeger's opinion that 'slaves were treated like objects; they had no rights; they did not even possess the right to life' (Kirchsclaeger 2016:68). Consequently, the welfare of slaves was not good. For example (Glancy 2011):

[L]ower-ranking slaves endured the violence not only of slave holders but also of slave overseers. Food for slaves was often doled out as rations, or else slaves waited until slaveholders finished eating before consuming the leftovers. (p. 5)

The situation in Nigeria is not dissimilar as (Charles 2001):

[P]atterns of punishment among domestic servants included flogging, food deprivation, scolding/abuses, infliction of injuries, forced to sleep outside at night, and forceful injection of pepper into parts of the body. (p. 126)

The research study by Awosusi and Adebo (2012) reveals more information on this. On living condition, they reveal that most domestic workers do not sleep in decent locations like their employers and families as some sleep in the garage, kitchen, guestrooms or boys' quarters (Awosusi and Adebo 2012:275). The research reveals that 68% of their respondents indicate that their food is of low quality compared with their employers as they do not eat the same food as them. As far as they are concerned, 'the living condition of the domestic servants is poor' (Awosusi & Adebo 2012:275). Domestic workers 'undergo physical abusive acts, including rape of girls who suffer emotional torture in the homes of their employers' (Orji & Nworgu 2019:252). Jilomes (2017) also has this to say:

While their own children go to school, their servants would have a plethora of chores to keep them fatigued all through the day Some others would agree on a monthly stipend, but

would renege on that agreement, turning their servants to unpaid slaves. Each month, one reason or the other would be given to avoid paying their servants for the work they had done. (n.p.)

Indicting Christian domestic servant employers, Jilomes (2017) says:

For those who are Christians, I find it annoying that they would bring domestic servants to church, not to participate in church service, but to watch over their children, so that they (the parents) can focus on the service as if the Jesus they believe in did not also die for their servants. (n.p.)

Although focusing on child domestic workers, another good situation report on the plight of domestic servants in Nigeria is from Ngele and Ikechukwu (2012), who opine that:

It (child domestic work) poses a lot of hazards to children. The issue of domestic violence, sexual, verbal and physical abuses, is just a tip of the 'iceberg' of the hazards child domestic workers face. Child domestic workers are in most times, treated as a common piece of property owned by their employers. (p. 185)

Another unpalatable dimension in the life of slaves in both Pauline and contemporary times is the sexual availability of female slaves. In Pauline times, 'it was so debased that the master was not the only one who had sexual rights to his slave, he could permit his friends and family members' (Finley 1980:96).

This subsection would be lopsided if there is no comment from how slaves also kick back at their masters, especially if they think they are being maltreated. In the Mediterranean days, slave revolt was not uncommon. Finley (1980:106) states that slaves were not used in Rome as soldiers because of the danger of a slave revolt. Dudrey (1999:30) confirms that 'numerous rebellions occurred. The revolt of Spartacus was one of the three major Roman slaves' wars'. Although Nigeria has not witnessed (and may never witness slave) revolts, there had been cases of maids hitting back at their masters. PM News of 05 August 2019 reports the case of a 14-year-old housemaid that scarred a two-year-old boy with beating and also gave him his faeces to eat.

Ephesians 6:5–9: Socio-rhetorical analysis

Although Ephesians 6:5–9 is the focal passage, the wider context of this passage is the whole of Ephesians. The writer has structured Ephesians as follows:

Opening Address	1:1–2
Thanksgiving	1:3–23
The Body	2:1–6:20

The body of the epistle is divisible into two parts: the indicative and the paraenetic sections. In the indicative section (2:1–3:21), the writer espouses how God turned

sinners into saints through faith (the incidences that took place among Jews) and he followed this by extending the grace to the Gentiles, consequently removing the barrier that divided the two (i.e. Jews and Gentiles), making them fellow citizens in God's household (Brown 2016:226).

In the paraenetic section (4:1–6:20), the section to which Ephesians 6:5–9 belongs, the writer explains the implications of God's plan: the directive to live a life worthy of God's calling. Consequently, the new humanity cannot continue to live according to the old pattern (Brown 2016:227). The paraenetic section can also be subdivided into the life expected within the Christian community and that expected within the household. Ephesians 5:21/22–6:9 is that dedicated to the life within the household and Ephesians 6:5–9 is the third section of this paraenetic section. Having seen the immediate context of the passage within the epistle, one can now continue to the passage itself.

Larkin's (2009) fascinating description of this passage forms the ground structure for the analysis of the passage. He says it:

[I]s composed of two exhortations: one to slaves (6:5–8) and the other to masters (6:9). Each exhortation uses the household codes formal elements: (1) the person addressed according to role (6:5a; 9a); (2) the command (to slaves in a standard-congruence pattern, with parallel participial phrases 6:5b–7); and to masters in a generic-specific pattern in 6:9b–c); and (3) the motive or rationale for the command (in parallel *ειδότες* constructions, 6:8, 9e–f). Cohesion for the section is achieved by the reference to participants (*δούλος* and *κύριος*; 6:5–6; 8–9) and the work done (*ποιούντες* ... *δουλεύοντες* ... *ποιήση*; 6:7, 8). It is further strengthened by the word play in which both slave and master relate to Christ as Lord. (p. 149)

The first exhortation: The person addressed

With *οι δούλοι*, the subsection opens with the weaker party addressed first. By starting with the slaves, Paul obviously 'reverses the order of the parties being addressed from what generally appears in non-Christian household instruction' (Gosnell 2006:125). The implication of this is that the slaves 'are treated as ethically responsible persons who are as fully members of the Christian community as their masters' (Lincoln 1990:424). Gombis (2005:329) says, 'the *Haustafel* is unique in that it directly addresses slaves, granting them a dignified and proper place in the New Humanity'. Gosnell (2006) further emphasises that this order goes on to reinforce the sense of a new honour conveyed throughout the letter. This address order is the first indication in this passage that Paul is not merely interested in upholding the status quo concerning the status of slaves.

The first exhortation: The command

The command in the first exhortation comes in the phrase *ὑπακούετε τοῖς κατὰ σάρκα κυρίοις*. The use of *ὑπακούετε*, a present continuous tense, is instructive here because as it

carries a continuous action, it is implying that the slaves should retain the expected obedience to their masters. He also goes ahead to qualify the kind of masters: those who are the earthly or human lords, and not the ultimate Lord, thus beginning the play on words that resonate throughout the passage.

The first exhortation: Parallel phrases

Larkin (2009) argues that there are five phrases that qualify the command. The first phrase is *μετὰ φόβου καὶ τρόμου*, which explains the way the obedience should be done (Larkin 2009). Because of the religious connotation of *φόβος* in other usages (Marshall 2004), scholars like Bruce (1984:400) holds the view that the phrase catches up with 'in fear of Christ' in 5:21 and concludes that 'it is Christ rather than these earthly masters that slaves should fear'. However, I uphold Lincoln's (2009) position that the phrase 'functions here to intensify the attitude of respect for the authority of masters. It emphasizes the obedience owed to human masters, not to God or Christ (p. 420). This is corroborated by Thielmann (2010:405) who says the phrase 'seems to refer to the recognition of the subordinate and weak position that one occupies with respect to others'. This position is to be upheld as *ὑπακούετε* is usually used for obedience in a relation of subordination (Kittel 1964:223). Thus, it is a call for slaves to 'have a genuine respect and reverence for a master's authority over a servant (Ngele & Ikechukwu 2012:186).

The second phrase is *ἐν ἀπλότητι τῆς καρδίας ὑμῶν*, which is another prepositional phrase that is directly governed by the main command. Like the first phrase, it tells the way the obedience should be done. *ἀπλότητι* literally means singleness, but when used with human beings, it implies simplicity, frankness or sincerity (Dankar & Bauer 2000:104). *ἀπλότητι* is also followed by the genitive of source, *τῆς καρδίας ὑμῶν*. This means a sincerity that comes from the inner man (Thielmann 2010:406). Adding the phrase *ὡς τῷ Χριστῷ* becomes a game changer as the sincerity is no longer at a human but divine level. As humans are expected to show Christ is unfeigned sincerity, Paul admonishes the slaves to have a guileless subservience to their masters.

The third phrase is *μὴ κατ' ὀφθαλμοδουλίαν*. With this phrase, Paul brought a negative reinforcement to the earlier positive phrase. The slaves are admonished to avoid eye service, that is (Lincoln 1990):

[T]he sort of service carried out by slaves in order to attract their masters' attention ... doing only what the masters can see and, therefore, acting differently and cutting corners when their backs are turned. (p. 421)

The fourth phrase *ὡς ἄνθρωπάρεσκοι* reinforces the third as it continues the notion of currying favour.

The fifth phrase, *ἀλλ' ὡς δοῦλοι Χριστοῦ ποιῶντες τὸ θέλημα τοῦ θεοῦ ἐκ ψυχῆς*, reveals that they should work as slaves of Christ who expectedly does God's will wholeheartedly. This is also a radical departure from the status quo.

The motive and rationale of the command (Eph 6:8)

As indicated earlier, the motive formula opens with *εἰδότες*. Paul states that the hope of reward from the Lord is the motivation to do as he has commanded. Although scholars like Thielmann (2010) hold the view that because the appearance of *κομίζω* in the middle voice implies repayment as in 2 Corinthians 5:10, there is a possible reference here to 'mundane rewards a master might give a slave to encourage the slave's cooperation and increased productivity' but this passage implies the eschatological reward.

The second exhortation: The person addressed (Eph 6:9a)

The first significant issue here is the use of *καὶ* to open the verse. It is odd having a conjunction in the first position in a sentence as the position implies that of emphasis, thus the usage should be determined. Larkin (2009:153) states that conjunctions are used to link groups with mutual obligations in the household codes thus serving as a continuative. Here, *καὶ* serves more than just a continuative. Lincoln (1990) observes that *καὶ* is used to tie the first and second exhortations together as:

[T]he mention of the free at the end of the previous verse and the connective *καὶ*, 'and,' the writer ties the paraenesis to slaves and that to the masters together. (p. 423)

Καὶ is followed immediately by *οἱ κύριοι*, thereby identifying the group being addressed.

The second exhortation: The command (Eph 6:9b-c)

The command is *τὰ αὐτὰ ποιεῖτε πρὸς αὐτούς*. Here, *τὰ αὐτὰ*, an accusative noun functioning as the direct object of the verb *ποιεῖτε*, is placed at the front position. This indicates that it is used to emphasise 'the parallel way the masters are to fulfil their responsibilities' (Larkin 2009:153). As a pronoun, *τὰ αὐτὰ* should have an antecedent. Scholars differ on what the antecedent should be. For example, Lincoln (1990:423) opines that it is 'a corresponding attitude to that required of slaves, namely, making their service of the one heavenly Master determinative for their actions', while Hoehner (2002:813) states that it is a 'spirit of integrity, dedication and goodwill' to the slave. However, considering *τὰ αὐτὰ* as the direct object of *ποιεῖτε* (do), the referent should be an action (Best 1998:580). The adjective *ἀγαθόν* in (6:8) is the most likely antecedent. The choice of *ἀγαθόν* is buttressed by the fact that it qualifies *ποιήση* (6:8) to which the imperative *ποιεῖτε* forms a parallel. As Thielmann (2010:408) concludes, 'the command is another way of urging masters to treat their slaves justly and fairly'. This being true, the radical departure of Paul's teachings from the convention becomes explicit.

The second exhortation: Parallel phrase

The parallel phrase is the participial phrase: *ἀνιέντες τὴν ἀπειλήν*. *ἀνιέντες* is a present active participle, although it has been translated mostly in the imperative. Its basic meaning is

'relaxation of tension', although it has nuances literally and metaphorically. Here, it is used metaphorically to mean 'give up' (Bultmann 1964:368). To bring out the participial quality, the phrase should be read as 'while giving up', which would be a contemporaneous action with ποιείτε, the main verb. Thus, it would be balancing the action of the command: in other words, Paul expects that while the masters are 'doing the same thing to the slaves', they are at the same time refraining from threatening. Asking the masters to stop violence is depriving them of the primary means of control of slaves at that time, and 'with this command, Paul has cut the thread that held the institution of slavery together' (Thielmann 2010:410).

The motive or rationale for the command (Eph 6:9e–f)

The rationale is also introduced by the εἰδότες, a perfect active participle meaning 'knowing'. Paul urged the masters to understand their status as slaves of Christ, making the masters to be co-slaves with their slaves. The reference to God's impartiality is also to 'make masters conscious of their present accountability, which they share equally with their slaves' (Lincoln 1990:424).

The message to the slaves and their masters

Message to the slaves

Slaves are to continue in obedience

Paul asked that the slave should continue in the expected obedience to their masters. Although modern readers see this as a tacit support for the slave institution, in truth, Paul's demand goes beyond the social structure because their obedience was not just an ordinary obedience but an obedience as demanded by Christ. This was a deeper demand than the societal demand.

Slaves are to work in sincerity of heart

Paul also addresses the attitude of the slaves. They are expected to work sincerely. Unlike many other slaves who do things that are pleasing because they want to curry favour, Christian servants are expected to work with inner sincerity.

Slaves are to avoid eye-service

Apart from working sincerely, the Christian slave is expected to work without the aim of showing off. No difference is expected in the slave's attitude to work whether the master is present or not.

Slaves are to work as to Christ

This can be said to be the peak of expectation from the slave. He should work as if he is accountable to God.

Message to the masters

Masters are to treat slaves with respect and dignity

Unlike the masters of their days, Paul felt that the Christian masters should treat their slaves with dignity and respect

(Hamilton 2017). In fact, he calls for a situation where they are seen as co-slaves and as brothers and are treated as such.

Masters are to stop threatening their slaves

As stated earlier, Paul demands that masters should stop any form of violence (verbal, physical, emotional and psychological). Little wonder he sent Onesimus back to Philemon, knowing that the natural judgement could be as high as death.

Application to the Nigerian situation

Although the messages above seem like a tacit approval of the institution of servanthood, there is a need to face reality like the writer of Ephesians did before the final application. Although the desire is to eradicate the use of children as domestic workers, all efforts to date have not yielded the desired result. For example, suggestions from writers range from the establishment of Ministry of Children, eradication of poverty and hawking (Agusiobo 2018:779–780; Femi 2011:120; Oluyemi & Yinusa 2016:56), and all these have not reduced the number of children in employment. Apart from this, if we stop these children from their employment, what would happen to them? Would this secure their future or endanger it? Therefore, the church might be better using the Ephesian initiative: transform the institution rather than call for its eradication (Lincoln 1990:428; Schnackenburg 2001:263).

Most of the families where domestic workers are used are full of negative behaviours. The message here to the workers is that whatever their situation, they must work sincerely and with integrity, viewing themselves as accountable to the Lord. They must also avoid negative behaviours through which they think they take vengeance. In other words, punishment of the children they are supposed to care for needed to be stopped and they must become caring and love the family they are serving.

The masters, however, must take these domestic workers as if they are their own children. The cases where their children do not take part in house chores must be stopped, and if possible, these servants could be enlisted in schools according to their level. They must be well clothed, and all forms of abuses should also stop. To do this, a shift in mentality must take place; they should also change the property mentality they have. This is only possible by living a life of faith. If they do these, the life of the domestic workers would also change for good, and they would also turn a new leaf.

Conclusion

As the larger proportion of domestic workers and their owners in Nigeria are Christians as it had been ascertained above, coupled with the fact that Christians are expected to be the light to the world, a change in the attitude of Christian masters of domestic servants would resonate far and wide

and may eventually change the attitude of non-Christian owners of domestic servants. The church has a role to play in this. The clergy could no longer play the blind fool to the harsh treatment their members mete out to their domestic servants. There should be conscientious teachings in this regard as well as guided counseling to ensure that changes take place. As the *Haustafel* 'presents a comprehensive vision of the eschatological New Humanity – the new creation politeia – realized under the conditions of this present fallen age' (Gombis 2005:322), it is the duty of every Christian to bring the new humanity into existence where they domiciled.

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O.A.A. is the sole author of this research article.

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