

VOCATION

Psalm 101 • Ephesians 4:25–5:2 • Large Catechism, Table of Duties

PSALM	Psalm 101:2 <i>“I will walk with integrity of heart within my house.”</i>
READING	Ephesians 4:32 <i>“Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.”</i>
BOOK OF CONCORD	Large Catechism <i>Table of Duties (Haustafel)</i>

The Texts

Psalm 101 is David’s resolve at the threshold of public office and domestic life: I will walk with integrity of heart within my house. The psalm names specific duties, the refusal to set anything wicked before the eyes, the cutting off of the slanderer, the appointment of the faithful, the daily destruction of the wicked from the city. It is a governance psalm and a household psalm simultaneously, and its governing concern is the specific conduct of a specific person in a specific station. The Large Catechism’s Table of Duties is the New Testament form of this resolve: a systematic prescription of what integrity of heart within my house actually requires for each station God has assigned.

Ephesians 4:25 through 5:2 provides the content Luther gathered for the Haustafel’s household duties. Put away falsehood and speak truth. Work honestly with your hands. Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up. Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another as God in Christ forgave you. Be imitators of God as beloved children and walk in love. These are not general moral principles; they are household duties assigned to specific people in specific relationships. Ephesians 5:1’s command to be imitators of God as beloved children is the Haustafel’s theological foundation: the Christian does not perform these duties to earn standing with God but from the standing already given, as a child who already belongs to the Father.

Discuss: *Psalm 101 is a resolve about specific conduct within a specific house, and Ephesians 4 and 5 give household duties that belong to specific relationships. The Haustafel gathers these into a single table for daily examination. What specific duty in the Table of Duties for your own station, husband, wife, parent, child, employer, or employee, is your household most urgently failing to practice, and what does the Haustafel’s daily examination require to be done about it?*

Key Terms

Term	What It Means
<i>Haustafel</i>	Table of Duties: a roster of the specific obligations belonging to each estate and vocation, drawn from New Testament texts. Originally printed as a broadsheet for the home wall, prescribing how each member of the household should conduct himself or herself in his or her specific calling.
Holy Orders and Stations	Luther’s label for the everyday vocations: husband, wife, parent, child, servant, master, magistrate. By calling them holy orders, the Haustafel deliberately reclaims the language the medieval church reserved for monks and priests and applies it to everyone doing ordinary work in God’s assigned stations.
The three great hierarchies	The Haustafel’s organizing structure: Church (bishops, pastors, and their hearers), State (civil government and subjects), and Home (husbands, wives, parents, children, servants, masters, youth, widows). Every human being lives in all three simultaneously.
Out into the stream of life	The Haustafel’s purpose: to take the theology of the Creed, Commandments, Prayer, and Sacraments and direct it outward into daily practice. You are freed from saving yourself so that you can give yourself entirely to serving family and neighbor in God’s assigned work.

Discuss: *The Haustafel’s organizing principle is that every person lives simultaneously in all three hierarchies: Church, State, and Home. Most people think of their Christian obligations primarily in terms of Church. How does placing the Home alongside the Church and State as a sphere of divinely ordered service change the weight a husband or parent assigns to his or her domestic duties, and what does the Haustafel require to be said to a church member who is faithful in the assembly and negligent at home?*

A Radical Protest Against Monastic Holiness

To understand what the Haustafel was doing in the sixteenth century, the class needs to see what it was protesting. The medieval church had divided humanity into those who pursued genuine holiness, priests, monks, and nuns who left the world for the cloister, and those who lived in the world in what were called dangerous estates. The domestic duties of husbands, wives, parents, children, and servants were regarded as worldliness, inherently spiritually inferior to the disciplines of the religious life. True Christianity, on this account, meant separation from the ordinary relationships and tasks of created life. Luther's Haustafel is a systematic demolition of this hierarchy. By labeling the everyday vocations *Holy Orders and Stations*, the Table reclaims the church's most elevated language and applies it to the person who gets up and goes to work, manages a household, raises children, and serves an employer. Luther taught that true Christianity does not mean fleeing into cloisters and solitudes but rather plunging courageously and cheerfully into practical life with its natural forms and relations as ordained by Creation, there to be tried as well as glorified. The Haustafel is the pastoral instrument of that plunge: a table of works hung on the wall of the home, prescribing for each person what God has actually ordered him or her to do.

Discuss: *The medieval church reserved the language of holy orders for monks and priests who left ordinary life; Luther applied the same language to every baptized person in every estate. Ephesians 5:1 commands the imitation of God as beloved children. How does understanding domestic work as a divinely assigned holy order change the way a mother, father, or child understands the theological weight of an ordinary Tuesday at home?*

Sweeping the Floor as Divine Worship

The Haustafel's most pastorally radical claim is about the comparative worth of ordinary household work in God's sight. Luther places the monk's fasting and prayer alongside the maid's cooking and sweeping and asks which is more pleasing to God. The answer is the maid's work, because the monk is performing a self-chosen work without God's command, while the maid is fulfilling God's direct assignment. Luther offers a startling image of pastoral comfort: the poor maid can say, "*I am going to cook and make the bed. God has commanded it. How can I be more blessed? It is just as much as if I were to cook for God in heaven.*" The assigned task and the One who assigned it are inseparable. The table I set for my family is the table God told me to set.

Psalm 101's walk with integrity of heart within my house is this claim made in David's voice. The integrity is not displayed in the sanctuary alone; it is displayed in the specific governance of the specific household: what is set before the eyes, who is appointed to office, how justice is done in the daily life of the home. Ephesians 4's household duties, honest work, edifying speech, kindness, tenderheartedness, forgiveness, are the specific content of that integrity. The Haustafel's function is to make that content concrete and examinable, not as a ladder to God but as the daily service of the person who has already been received into God's household through Baptism.

Discuss: *Luther says the maid cooking and sweeping in faith is performing a holier work than the monk fasting and praying in the cloister, because she is doing what God assigned and the monk is doing what he chose. Ephesians 4 gives the household duties as the content of that assigned work. What is the specific Ephesians 4 duty your household most consistently fails to perform, and what would it mean to take up that failure as a matter of confessing it to God and correcting it as a holy order?*

Out into the Stream of Life

The Haustafel's placement at the end of the Catechism is deliberate. The class has worked through the Commandments, the Creed, the Lord's Prayer, and the Sacraments; it has received the full doctrinal formation the Catechism provides. The Table of Duties is the Catechism's answer to the question: now what? The answer is not to cultivate a more sophisticated private spirituality or to increase religious observance. The answer is out into the stream of life with what you have learned. Polycarp Leyser's comparison is exact: just as a housefather summons his servants and prescribes to each what to do, God has received us into His household through Baptism and hung up this table to assign each of us our work.

The Table concludes by gathering all its specific duties for all its specific stations into a single summary, Romans 13:9: "*Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. Herein are comprehended all the commandments.*" The specific prescription for husbands and wives and children and masters and servants is the flesh and bone of that one commandment. This is what love of neighbor looks like in the specific relationships God has given me. The freedom of the Gospel, the justification by faith that the Creed and the Sacraments have taught, is freedom from the burden of saving oneself, so that the self is entirely available to serve the people God has placed in the home, the state, and the church assigned to it.

Discuss: *The Haustafel ends with the summary of Romans 13:9, that love of neighbor comprehends all commandments, and its practical implication is that the specific duties for each station are the specific form love takes in the specific relationships God has assigned. How does a congregation teach its members to move from the abstract conviction that they love their families to the concrete daily examination of whether they are fulfilling the specific duties the Haustafel names for their station?*

The Payoff

Psalm 101's resolve to walk with integrity of heart within my house is the prayer the Haustafel is designed to answer. Ephesians 5:1's command to be imitators of God as beloved children is the theological ground on which the answer is given: we perform these duties not to become beloved children but from the position of those who are already beloved, already received into the Father's household through Baptism, already assigned our work, already freed from the burden of earning what God has given. The maid cooking for God in heaven and the magistrate governing by God's authority and the husband dwelling with his wife according to knowledge are all doing the same thing: carrying the theology of the Catechism out into the stream of life where God has placed them.