

# Dr. David deSilva, The Cultural World of the New Testament, Session 5, Family and Household

© 2024 David deSilva and Ted Hildebrandt

This is Dr. David deSilva in his teaching on The Cultural World of the New Testament. This is session 5, Family and Household.

The family is the most basic social unit in human society, the group that, for most individuals, is the most frequently encountered and the most significantly engaged social unit over the course of a lifetime.

What was family like in the first century? What expectations did members of a household have in regard to one another? What was the everyday context and ethos, in other words, of so much kinship language that we find in the pages of the New Testament? How can we explain the importance Paul, for example, assigns to establishing adoption by God and incorporation into the family of Abraham? What kind of community did the early Christian leaders seek to nurture by selecting brother and sister as the primary model for inner church relationships? If we are to recapture the richness of the New Testament vision for communities of faith as the household of God, as well as understand texts that speak about family, lineage, and how kin behave, we need to immerse ourselves in the ancient realities and ethic of kinship. How do we establish kinship in the ancient world? In America, realtors have a saying: the three most important factors in buying property are location, location, and location. In the ancient world, lineage established the location of a person in the social fabric.

The careful attention to genealogies throughout the Old and New Testaments bears witness to this. If we look, for example, to Ezra and Nehemiah and think of the reforms that were put in place among the community of the exile, we see just how important lineage and the ability to trace lineage is for being a part of the social body known as the nation of Israel, the people of Israel. If you don't have a verifiable lineage within the family of the 12 tribes, you are not part of that people.

Within the nation of Israel, an internal structure is provided. Internal hierarchies are formed on the basis of lineage. Again, in those same books, we could look to the careful attention given to preserving and articulating the lineage of the priestly and Levitical clans.

In the ancient world, the individual's merit, as well as his or her place in society, begins with his or her parents' merits, his or her family's or clan's merits, and his or her ancestors' merits. We touched on this briefly in our discussion of honor. The starting point for a person's honor is the honor of the family into which he or she was born, which he or she inherits from forebears.

A good example of this comes from the Apocrypha in the book of Tobit. Tobit is sending his son Tobias on a mission to collect some talent's weight of silver that had been left in deposit with a friend of the family on a journey. Tobit asks questions about that person's lineage.

So, I'll read from chapter 5, verses 11, and the following. Tobit asked Azariah, Brother, what family are you from, and from what tribe? Tell me, brother. Azariah replied, Why do you need to know my tribe? But Tobit said, I want to be sure, brother, whose son you are and what your name is.

He replied I am Azariah, the son of the great Hananiah, one of your relatives. Then Tobit said to him, Welcome. God save you, brother.

Don't feel bitter toward me, brother, because I wanted to be sure about your ancestry. It turns out that you are a kinsman of a good and noble lineage. For I knew Hananiah and Nathan, the two sons of Shemaliah, and they used to go with me to Jerusalem and worshiped with me there, and they were not led astray.

Your kindred are good people. You come of good stock. Hearty welcome.

So, the ultimate resume that Azariah has to offer is his family lineage, his immediate family. And because he is known to come of good stock, he has the credit rating of his forebears in Tobit's eyes, and so he is accepted as the person who will accompany Tobit's son Tobias on this potentially very hazardous mission. So, kinship and honor are very closely intertwined in these cultures.

Think about how Matthew, the Gospel of Matthew starts. People often ask me, not in seminary, but in other contexts, how I know more about Jesus. How do I get into this? I say, Well, read the Gospels. And then I immediately think to myself, Oh, but don't start with Matthew, because Matthew 1:1-17 is a terrible way to start a story about Jesus if you're born in 21st century America.

But why does Matthew start that way? It's not because he lacked an editor. It's because, in his culture, he knows the way to talk about Jesus, and his significance is to talk about his lineage. So, it's a great way to open the story of Jesus in the first century by going through and laying out Jesus' descent from Abraham and David.

That way, Matthew can establish an essential claim about Jesus' identity as the heir of the promises made to David and the heir of the promises made to Abraham. So, it's a highly theological chapter, even though to us, it's like reading stereo instructions, perhaps. Another facet just on the side of that genealogy is Matthew's emphasis on the number 14.

Students of the New Testament are always vexed by the fact that Matthew presents a 42-generation lineage of Jesus, while Luke presents, I think, a 56-generation lineage of Jesus. And so, some people say, Well, that's from Mary's side, and they must have had bad genes because they all died a lot sooner because there are 56 generations there in the time it takes this other genealogy to get through 42 generations. But what Matthew is doing is, in effect, highlighting, through numerology, the significance of Jesus as heir of David.

In Hebrew, which lacks numerals, it uses its characters for letters and numbers. In Hebrew, the name of David, spelled with a dalet above and another dalet, adds up to 14. And so, by encoding 14 into the genealogy of Jesus, separating those three major events, Abraham, David, and then the exile, finally all redeemed in the coming of Christ, Matthew is able to say something about Jesus as the ultimate offspring and seed of David.

In Shakespeare's Hamlet, Hamlet looks askance at his uncle Claudius, who has now also become his stepfather. At one point, after Claudius has gone on in a speech that shows something of his character, Hamlet says, A little more than kin and less than kind. And by kind there, he doesn't mean gentle and nice.

He means of the same stock or of the same sort, probably of the brother, Hamlet's actual father, that Claudius supplanted. Spoiler alert: he actually killed his own brother. In any event, kinship is often found in being of the same kind, of reflecting the same kind of essence in a kind of natural connection.

This can happen at the level of the ethnos of the people group. Greeks, who might not really be related in any traceable way by blood, nevertheless could talk about their kinship with one another vis-a-vis barbarians because at least we Greeks, whatever our actual lineage, are of the same kind. We are like enough that we can regard each other as essentially kin, as opposed to that group that is so different from us.

Similarly, Jews recognized broadly their kinship vis-a-vis non-Jews, although this was also pretty much rooted in a vastly extended genealogy, tracing back to Abraham through Isaac through Jacob. One can also look at kinship at more local levels: the level of the tribe, the level of the clan, or the level of the family within the clan. The level at which kinship was operative could change with the context.

For example, in the Diaspora, where Jews often find themselves a minority, surrounded by a majority of other people groups, other races, and other nations, they might be more inclined to treat other Jews and regard other Jews as kin, regardless of the proximity of actual genealogical connections between them. This could change then in a place where Jews were the majority of people in a given

locale. For example, in Galilee or in Judea, where since most of us are Jews anyway, what really counts for kin is defined more narrowly.

And so, we'll treat our family, our clan, more like kin, but people of other tribes or even outside our clan more like outsiders, as opposed to like family. And it could change over time. Take a village in Judea, right as a Roman cohort is marching through the village.

At that moment, all the Jews in the village probably felt more closely related to one another, by virtue of the presence of this visible and empowered outside group that was definitely not us. We are, compared to our relationship with them, we are all family. But then, after the Roman cohort is gone, we could be back to defining our kinship group much more narrowly and no longer thinking of Jews from other clans in that village as the people to whom we owe the obligations of family.

So, all that to say, kinship can be thought of rather fluidly. Our definition can expand or contract depending on the setting and what's going on in this context. It seems to me that Jesus has a tendency, in any context, to assert the larger family of Abraham over any smaller divisions, whether they're the divisions based on kinship groups or the divisions based on likeness.

For example, all those who subscribe to the doctrine and practice of the Pharisees, who, though they're not all closely related genealogically, are likely to regard each other more as kin to one another based on being of a like-kind one to another. Against these smaller subgroupings of what is kin in Israel, Jesus keeps pointing out the relationship of all Jews one to another as sons and daughters of Abraham. Therefore, we should be people who really ought not to be dividing themselves from one another but treating one another as sisters and brothers.

For example, when challenged in regard to healing the crippled woman on the Sabbath, he refers to her as this daughter of Abraham, asserting the essential family connection between the healed, formerly crippled woman and the synagogue officials who are complaining about his act of love and healing toward her. He refers to Zacchaeus, who is much, and to some extent, deservedly maligned, as a tax-gatherer, as someone working for them in Judea, working for the Roman occupation force in Judea, helping the Roman occupation force to get their taxes and tribute and lining his pockets, more than likely, that's a stereotype at least, in the process. But with Zacchaeus' change of heart, Jesus says this also; he is also a son of Abraham.

What was important to Jesus at that moment was restoring Zacchaeus to family relations with the rest of the population after he had been alienated from them by virtue of his alignment with the Roman occupiers. Most famously, we consider Jesus' parable. It's often called the parable of the prodigal son, but I prefer to call it the

parable of the two brothers since, let's face it, neither one of those boys was really behaving well in that story.

In response to the Pharisees, and perhaps it was the scribes and Pharisees, complaining about Jesus' propensity to eat with sinners and tax collectors, those whom the Pharisees considered other, some other kind of human being, belonging to a group that is not us. Jesus tells this story to remind the scribes and Pharisees that those sinners and tax-gatherers are also Jews. They are part of the nation of Israel.

They are part of Abraham's extended kinship group. And so, really, a better way to think about them is not as those sinners and tax-gatherers but as our brothers and sisters. Hence, he tells a story of two brothers at odds with one another in ways that make it perfectly clear that neither one is behaving in a way that honors the father who makes the two of them siblings one to another.

Now, perhaps one of the more important things we can think about for the sake of New Testament interpretation is the ethos, the ethic that was held to govern kinship relationships in the ancient world. Wherever the circle of kinship was established, a different ethic was held to guide kin in their relations with one another than guided their relations with outsiders. This was ultimately rooted in the conviction that kinship meant working for one another's good, not for one's own good at the expense of one's kin.

We come here to the basic models of social interaction, cooperation versus competition. We mentioned in our first lecture in this series that many things were regarded in the ancient world as limited goods commodities. For me to get more of something, you had to have less, whether that be grain, money, honor, or whatever.

And so, a limited good economy particularly sparks competition as a kind of default mode for interacting around acquiring those goods. However, families were expected not to compete for goods so that one gained at another's expense but rather to cooperate so that the whole kinship unit gained greater access to the goods it needed or wanted. The strength, the unity, and the good of the whole kinship unit is the common good of all of its members.

In this context, the relationship between siblings was often considered to be one of the strongest and most important bonds among human beings in the ancient world. It was the epitome of friendship. Friends would hold all things in common.

Friends would share common values and commitments. Friends would look out for one another's interests and share resources to meet one another's needs. Siblings were discussed, for example, in Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* as the pinnacle, the exemplar of friendship in action.

Now, in 20th and 21st century America, and probably Canada and Western Europe at least, we kind of accept the idea of sibling rivalry. Now, my wife and I have three sons, and we, you know, I hold before them the ancient ideals of how brothers should act, but really, in so many ways, they act out the script of sibling rivalry that has become kind of accepted and commonplace in the West. And there was probably a sense in which, in fact, there was definitely a sense in which brothers would compete in the ancient world, but they were very careful.

Ethicists were very careful. Families were very careful not to cultivate competition between siblings, which meant one sibling won out over another or gained something at the expense of another. So, they might try to outdo one another in some venture, but always in such a way that the good of the whole family was advanced, not that one brother won at another's expense.

Where we commonly talk about sibling rivalry, people in the ancient world commonly spoke of a Cadmean victory. Now, that phrase might not mean too much to us unless we've read a lot of Greek drama, but if you're familiar at all with the Oedipus story, you might know that it's not just about Oedipus and his generation. It's about what happened with his children, and it's called Cadmean because Oedipus is a descendant of Cadmus.

And so, Oedipus, after his tragedy was underway, Oedipus' sons found themselves on opposite sides of a war. One of them sided with the Persians who were trying to conquer Thebes, and one-sided, of course, with the army of Thebes. And they killed each other in battle.

This became known as a Cadmean victory because it really represented the nadir, the lowest point of sibling relationships. Each was trying to win, but you can't win if you're fighting against your brother or your sister. It's just simply impossible to have a victory in that situation.

So, in the ancient world, ethicists tried very hard to instill the value of seeking one another's interests among brothers and sisters. Even in an honor-sensitive society, siblings were to advance the other person's honor. So, as a brother, I wouldn't just seek to advance my own, but if something came my way, I would try to find a way to let my brother or sister share in the honor that I had gained or the access to some privileges that I had gained.

Certainly, I would never seek to gain something at the expense of a sister or brother. You might already be seeing where I'll be going with this in regard to Christian kinship when we call each other brothers and sisters within the church and what it means to make that real. Another very important facet of the ethos of kin, alongside cooperation in all things, was trust.

Because kin cooperates to advance each other's and the family's interests, they can trust each other. In the ancient world, deceit and lying were often regarded as perfectly appropriate strategies to advance one's interests against outsiders. For example, in the apocryphal book Judith, Judith lies through her teeth left and right in order to get close enough to the enemy general, Holofernes, to cut off his head.

She is trying to advance, spoiler alert again, I'm sorry, she is trying to advance the good of her village, which is being besieged by this general and his army. Using deceit to get really close to him is perfectly acceptable and praiseworthy to advance the good of her own kinship group. It would be, however, utterly shameful to use deceit or lying against one's own family members.

This means, in effect, treating your kin as an outsider and breaking the trust and commitments of cooperating with one another for the good of each other. Family was to be marked by unity, harmony, sharing values, and sharing goods. Brothers and sisters were to share common ideals, values, and goals.

One often finds the injunction to brothers to be of one mind in ancient literature. And I'm not just talking about Christian literature, but Greco-Roman ethical literature. To preserve their unity and to preserve their harmony at all costs, it is better to lose an argument to lose a share of an inheritance than lose a brother's or a sister's love and to break or rupture the harmony that should characterize kin.

This unity and harmony are also expressed in the sharing of resources among kin as any might need. When conflict arises or injuries happen, siblings are to seek forgiveness and reconciliation. They are to hide each other's disgrace or shameful acts from outsiders and to act with patience toward one another.

It's a very different ethos from how one treats or responds to outsiders in this world. It is an excellent primer on the ethic of sibling love, which is relevant because Philadelphia, the love of brothers and sisters, is a very prominent ethical term in the New Testament. For an excellent primer, read Plutarch's tract on fraternal affection, sometimes called on brotherly love.

It's a wonderful window into this ideal of the ethos of kin in the ancient world. Let's think together for a bit about the ancient household, what it looked like, and how it ran. Aristotle, again in his *Nicomachean Ethics*, talks about the household and its personnel, as it were, and the roles they play and how it functions.

He talks about a household as composed of, at the minimum, a husband and wife, a father and children, a master and slaves. What's noteworthy about his description is that one member of each pair is actually the same person. The father, the husband,

the master, that's all the same guy who is, therefore, kind of the central hub of the household.

There are, of course, many possible extensions of this basic household. It was very common for unmarried siblings and female relations to be part of a household and to live together with this previously described household as part of that unit. It would often incorporate any surviving parents, either of the husband or the wife.

And it sometimes even incorporated married siblings and their children in a larger unit. When it comes to marriage, Jews would tend to marry, tend to marry, within the ethnos, within the Jewish people, often within the tribe or the clan. Again, to turn to the apocryphal book of Tobit, which probably reflects more 3rd-century B.C. ethics than 1st-century A.D. ethics, Tobit considers marrying a foreigner to be a kind of fornication.

It was as good as living in sin for a Jew to marry outside of the Jewish ethnos, even outside of the tribe. Marriages were generally arranged because marriages brought families together. And they were understood, really, as alliances between families, not as an act determined by two lovebirds based on individual motivations.

And women tended always to be embedded, conceptually, in the household of some male. The household of their father, prior to marriage. The household of the husband after marriage.

And should a divorce happen, back to the household of her father. Divorce was handled differently among different people groups in this time. Among Jews, only husbands, technically, could initiate.

So, in Judea, in areas where we were very conscious about living in line with the law of Moses to the extent that the foreign oppressors allowed, wives would have a very difficult time initiating a divorce. This probably was easier in diaspora Jewish communities. The more the Jewish community is a minority, the more the dominant culture's legal system could be appealed to.

Among Romans and Greeks, however, either a husband or wife could initiate a divorce. And it generally meant a wife returning to her nearest surviving male kin's household. So, the father, if he was still alive, or a brother if the father had since passed away.

She would return with her dowry, which was part of the bride's father's inheritance, and the bride took it with her wherever she went. So, it would become part of the new estate only if the marriage lasted till death parted the couple. Something that's very different about the ancient household from, certainly, at least, the modern



American household is that households were units of production and not merely units of consumption.

My house, I mean, honestly, you know, the five of us, we don't really produce much of anything together except recycling and garbage. But we consume together.

But in the ancient world, a household like ours would also be a basic unit of production. You could consider this at the most exalted patrician level, where a senator and his family might reside in Rome themselves and never actually see a country estate. But part of the estate, a part of the household, I should say, was not just the husband and wife, the father and children, but the master and slaves.

And that patrician senator could have hundreds upon hundreds of slaves working many estates far in the hinterlands away from Rome. And so even the patrician household was a household of production with massive agricultural ventures coming out of that extended, vastly extended household unit. Now, go to a much more humble setting, an artisan household.

For example, even the household that we presume to have been Jesus' own household of origin was very likely. A craftsman, Joseph, was accompanied in and joined in that craft by one or more of his sons, who would work together to raise income and keep that household going by working together. Alongside them, the women of the household, hence Mary and the unnamed half-sisters of Jesus, would also contribute in some way, either by helping to manage the work of the men.

It's actually surprising sometimes to find out how many women actually kept the books for these households of production and things like that. Or by participating in what is referred to as women's work in the ancient world. So, they might engage in a craft of their own alongside what the men do to be a producing unit as well as a consuming unit.

We might also think, for example, of Simon's household, who comes to be known as Peter, and his brother Andrew. Their whole family was probably involved in some way in the fishing business, as certainly was the household of Zebedee, whose two sons were in the boat with him. And in these scenarios, it's again likely that the women at home participated in the family business of fish in some way.

I was recently in Magdala, for example, where a kind of domestic industrial area was uncovered. And it was a fishing town, just like Capernaum presumably was. Within the household structures was a room dedicated to drying, salting, and preserving fish.

So, quite likely, the women of the Zebedee household were also engaged in assisting in the production of the family business. Now, the husband-slash-father-slash-master

is ultimately in charge of household management. The science in the ancient world that gives us our word economics.

It's called oikonomia, the rule of or the management of the oikos, the household. Ethicists speak of this man's authority in terms of duty, diligence, and beneficent care. Of course, in practice, these heads of households wore their authority in a manner reflective of their own virtue or their lack thereof.

And, of course, it is a strictly hierarchical and patriarchal society. Again, if we were to turn to Aristotle to read what he has to say about the household in his *Nicomachean Ethics*, he speaks of the male as the natural ruler within the household and the female as the natural subject. That is to say, by the very way males and females are constituted from birth, with their natural giftings and limitations, he says, I'm quick to add, he says it's proper for the male to be dominant and the female to be led.

He compares the father's rule over children and over slaves as that of an absolute monarch over his subjects. Aristotle compares a husband's rule over a wife to the constitutional rule among citizens who are equal in value but not in power. So he observes some distinction there but nevertheless establishes rather clearly the authority of the husband-master-father over everyone else in the household.

Jewish authors are actually more extreme and more sweeping in their claims. For example, Josephus, when he writes about household management briefly, writes that the woman, says the law, is in all things inferior to the man. Let her accordingly be submissive, not for her humiliation, but that she may be directed.

For authority has been given by God to the man. Now, Greek, Roman, and Jewish ethicists all agree that the husband is not to use his power to his wife's hurt. Aristotle, moreover, says nothing about women's inferiority.

But Josephus does. So, there is some variation among these ancient sources regarding precisely how a woman's position is conceived of. I've often heard it said that in the ancient world, women were regarded as property, as chattel.

But to be honest, I have yet to find a Greco-Roman or a Jewish author who actually used that word to talk about women in their households. They are not at all shy to talk about slaves as property. But I don't actually find them applying the same language to women.

Perhaps that's a kind of stereotype that we impose on the ancient world that needs reexamining. Wives were seen as essential partners in the management of the household, but admittedly always as junior partners by virtue of their gender, without any taking into account their gifts and ability. Now, there was a fairly well-

articulated ideal for the woman, the wife, in the ancient world, and on this score, there's a great deal of unanimity between Greek, Latin, and Jewish authors.

One of the features in this ideal is submission, as we have already been discussing from the quote from Josephus. Plutarch presents this a little bit more artfully using the analogy of music. In his *Advice on Marriage*, he writes that when two notes are struck together, the melody belongs to the lower note.

Similarly, every action performed in a good household is done by the agreement of the partners but displays the leadership and the decision of the husband. We could note, incidentally, how different music was in the ancient world. In my experience, I'm used to the sopranos having the melody and every other voice part below them having harmony, but apparently, Greek and Roman music operated the opposite way, with the melody being given to the lower playing instrument or, the lower singing voice, and the harmony or the descant to the higher singing voice.

So, Plutarch uses this image to nuance the image of how husbands and wives relate well together. He tries to soften it; everything should happen by agreement, but it's the man who leads in the agreement. Another facet of this ancient ideal of the wife or the woman is silence and reticence to speak.

Aristotle approved the poet who wrote that silence is a woman's glory, and two or three centuries later, in a very different environment, in the second century B.C. Jerusalem, Ben Sirah writes a silent wife is a gift from the Lord, and nothing is so precious as her self-discipline. Obviously, silence, the restraint of self-expression, goes along with submission and waiting for the husband to take the lead.

A third aspect of this ideal is seclusion, the woman keeping herself to the private spaces of the household, or if in public, to the public spaces appropriate to women, like the market or, in some desert societies, the well. Philo, a Jewish author writing in Alexandria, Egypt, in the first part of the first century A.D. writes that women are best suited to the indoor life, which never strays from the house, within which the middle door, an inner door, the middle door is taken by maidens as their boundary, and the outer door by those who reach full womanhood. Plutarch, a non-Jewish Greek writer writing about 100 A.D., writes that a good woman should be seen most when she is with her husband and stay at home or be hidden when he is away.

So again, males took the public spaces by storm, as it were, but the idea for the women was quite different. And then, a final and indispensable aspect of this ideal is sexual purity. An anonymous Neo-Pythagorean ethicist wrote that a woman's greatest virtue is chastity, by which he means sexual exclusivity, chastity before marriage, and sexual engagement with one man over the course of her lifetime.

And this is borne out in Greek, Latin, and Jewish texts. We had spoken in a previous lecture about Fourth Maccabees, a book in which, among other things, a woman is praised for her manliness, her courage, for having bravery that would put the courage shown by men on the battlefield to shame. But even after all that, the author must return in the end to stress her female virtue.

And so, in the last chapter, we read her saying, I was a pure virgin and did not go outside my father's house. There's that seclusion that facilitates chastity. But I guarded the rib from which woman was made.

No seducer corrupted me on a desert plain, nor did the destroyer, the deceitful serpent, defile the purity of my virginity. In the time of my maturity, I remained with my husband. So, that idea of sexual exclusivity for and with a single male throughout a lifetime.

We return from thinking about marriage, and then in particular the ideal of the wife in the ancient world, to children and their reality. Children in the ancient household were under the absolute authority of their parents, most particularly, the father. And they were taught to understand their duty toward their parents.

Children, Aristotle would say, for example, can never repay the debt that they owe their parents for the gift of life itself, not to mention nurture and upbringing. And so, children must continue to honor their parents and show gratitude in all of its forms throughout their parents' lives. It was a special mark of filial piety, of fulfilling one's duty as a son or daughter to care for aging parents.

Children were thought of as being like their parents in all essential respects. We'd already seen how an honorable parentage reflects positively on children. A frequent way to challenge a person's honor in the ancient world is to speak about his or her parentage.

Maybe that hasn't changed all that much but consider the Gospel of John, for example, where Jesus' critics claim to be children of Abraham. And Jesus responds, you're the offspring of Satan. You're the spawn of Satan.

Attacking parentage as a way of attacking honor. Education varied greatly in the ancient world. It began in the home for all people but was often largely confined to the home for families of lesser means.

It would have included learning the family trade and sufficient literacy to do business if that were relevant, but also the values and morals of the larger group to which that family belonged. Religious instruction was a matter for the home. First, we could consider here Deuteronomy 6:6-9, as a stellar example.

That core text within Judaism is the closest thing to a creed that Judaism has. Here, Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one, or the Lord is our God alone. But the very next thing, or almost the very next thing that says, you will teach the commandments of your Lord to your children.

And religious instruction is laid upon parents to convey to the next generation. If we were again to turn to 4 Maccabees 18, in verses 10 through 19, we'd see a wonderful picture of the prescription of Deuteronomy 6 being lived out as a mother remembers how the father of this household consistently and patiently instilled the values and stories and hope contained within the scriptures of Israel in their seven sons, thus making them the kind of people that they proved to be on that fateful day when they chose to die for the sake of piety. For the male children of modestly affluent or even more affluent families, education could be more extensive.

Many such families, and now we are, of course, talking about the upper echelon, maybe the upper 2 to 5% of families, could afford to own multiple slaves. If they had children, one of those slaves might function as a pedagogue, which would be a slave whose principal duty was to teach the children manners and to make sure the children knew how to stay in line when the children began to be taught things, to make sure that the children did their homework and went back to their actual teacher the next day fully prepared.

Hmm, pedagogues sound like a pretty good idea to me. But then the pedagogue wasn't actually the teacher. Our word pedagogy is derived from it, but that's really kind of a false connection.

The real teachers would be outside of the household, and the pedagogue was the disciplinarian who made sure the lessons got learned, and the homework got done, among other things. For citizens in a Greek or a Roman city or colony, there was actually, in almost every city, a strong system of public education for that very limited circle of people, the citizens in that city. Many ancient cities still have ruins of a gymnasium, a gymnasium, which, of course, was a place for learning athletics, practicing sports, and getting physically fit, but that was all part of a much larger program of education.

The gymnasium was also a place where citizens learned grammar, rhetoric, logic, philosophy, literature, geometry, music, and the whole curriculum of the ancient world. There were also schools of a different sort in various contexts. For example, we know that in the Jewish context, there were schools that might incorporate some of these other areas of learning but were primarily focused on teaching Torah, teaching the wisdom tradition of Israel, and perhaps then at best, weaving together the wisdom tradition of Israel and the religious instruction of Torah with other kinds of non-indigenous education.

We come to the last layer of the household, the bottom-most layer of a household. There's no other way to put it, namely slavery. Slavery was incredibly common in the ancient world. Around the Mediterranean, it is estimated that one in five people was a slave.

In some urban settings, that could even be increased to one in four or, by some estimates, even one in three. Slavery was often the result of military conquest or the suppression of a revolt. So, for example, as Rome expanded its frontiers, the people whom it conquered by force often ended up sold as slaves within the empire.

So, as Rome expanded, the availability of slaves for the whole empire increased as well. All throughout Tacitus and Josephus, you can read how those engaged in the slave trade traveled with and followed the army because they knew where the army went, slaves would be made, and they wanted to be there to cash in at the ground floor, essentially, and buy the slaves from the army directly, and then go sell them back closer to the heart of the empire for their profit. Slavery could also be the result of the imposition of a penalty for a criminal act.

It was a common punishment for a wide variety of crimes. If you were born to slaves, you were a slave. So simple procreation among slaves was another source for this.

And defaulting on a debt, particularly in Egypt, often resulted in the enslavement of the defaulter who would be sold to discharge part or all of the debt. And then, of course, he belonged or she belonged to someone else. The ancient economy existed because of slavery and was built completely upon slavery.

So, as we think about the wealth of ancient Greece, of the Hellenistic world, the wealth of Rome, and those who profited from Rome, we need to remember that they are all profiting because of, at least indirectly, in many cases directly, because of the institution of slavery throughout the Roman Empire and going back to Aristotle, who was a great informant for actually just about anything in the ancient world because he wrote on just about everything. Aristotle speaks of the slave as a living tool.

It's a notorious definition, but essentially, it captures it. It captures exactly what a slave is for Aristotle. The slave is different from the hammer in that the slave is alive, and the hammer is not.

But in terms of rights, and in terms of the degree to which a master has authority over the master's property, the slave and the hammer don't differ much at all. Aristotle reasons that some are slaves by nature, others by chance of fortune. That is to say, perhaps some countries seem to just breed slaves, in his estimation.

But he also knows of people, of slaves, who aren't servile. They have been reduced to slavery because of some misfortune. For example, military conquest.

In Aristotle's day, the conquest of city-state over city-state or the advance of the Persian Empire over most of the world east of where Aristotle lived. The slave was under the complete power of the owner. But ethicists tried to inculcate a careful exercise of that authority on the part of slave owners.

For example, Aristotle writes that the abuse of this authority is injurious to both parties. For the interests of part and whole, of body and soul are the same. And the slave is a part of the master, a living but separated part of his bodily frame.

All the ethics notwithstanding, the treatment of slaves could be brutal. And when it was, there was no legal recourse. Some ethicists tried to counteract the power imbalance between masters and slaves by fostering relationships of reciprocity between masters and slaves.

So, the kind of relationship we talked about under patronage or friendship or reciprocity would be introduced into the master-slave relationship as these writers tried to cultivate a desire on the part of both parties to exchange kindness within the framework of this unequal relationship. And I think we see something of this in the story from Luke 7 where a centurion is solicitous for the welfare of his slave, but so solicitous that he goes to significant lengths and even to some extent sets aside his own honor to attain, to achieve for his slave what that slave needs, namely healing. Nothing could change the fact, however, that all aspects of a slave's life, even his or her procreation, were under the power and authority of a master and were, therefore, completely at the mercy of the virtue or the lack of virtue of this master.

Slaves could be put to a very wide variety of tasks and find themselves living out their lives in a wide variety of locations. At the worst end of the spectrum were the slaves who were chained to the boats, rowing naval ships or merchant ships, or working in the mines, which was often expected to result in death after just a very few years. But there were also, at the furthest end of the spectrum from that, slaves within the imperial emperor's household.

Some of the slaves in the emperor's household exercised more power than governors in the provinces and were able to amass more wealth for themselves than governors in the provinces, becoming eventually freed persons and agents of note in their own right. In Ephesus, there's a large gate to the large agora, the forum marketplace, a place for craftsmen in the city. And that gate, the south gate, was erected by two freedmen of Augustus' own household.

And that's a testimony to two things. First, there is a testimony of gratitude to one's patron, as these freedmen regarded Augustus as their patron because he had

granted them liberty. But also, a testimony to just how wealthy and how powerful some slaves could become if they were lucky enough to be imperial slaves as opposed to ending up in some other quarter.

Now, we've said a lot about kinship within natural households, but kinship also meant more than blood relations, even for people in the ancient world. Philo, our early first-century Jew from Alexandria, writes that kinship is not measured only by blood but by the similarity of conduct and pursuit of the same goals. Philo points out also that failure to share ideals, such as the apostasy on the part of one family member from the Jewish way of life, leads to the dissolving of kinship ties.

Philo places commitment to God and to the Jewish way of life ahead of natural kinship when he urges his readers to make sure that Gentile converts, people who could not possibly be related in any genealogical way to the Jewish people, when he urges his readers to make sure that Gentile converts who have left behind, quote, their country, their kinfolk, and their friends for the sake of virtue and religion, find a welcome into a new family, the Jewish community. Quite similarly, Jesus recognizes that following him threatens natural kinship connections, and so he speaks of his followers forming a new family together. We might call this a fictive kinship group, not related by blood and genealogy, per se, but sharing so closely other commitments that being kind, being of a like kind is more important than being kin in a natural sense.

So, Jesus says, whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me. Whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. So, on that note, Jesus expects the potential breaking of natural kinship ties for the sake of discipleship.

And then on the other hand, everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or fields for my name's sake will receive a hundredfold and will inherit eternal life. Those who come together in Jesus' circle become to one another brothers and sisters and mother and children, and the homes of fellow believers and the fields of fellow believers become one's own homes and fields in this life, kind of making up for the loss of any natural kinship relations. Well, we want to look at the New Testament, and we're going to look in the next lecture at 1 Peter, in particular, to think about how this background helps us see what's happening in the early church as it is being formed into a fictive kinship group.

How is this new family conceived of? How does the ethos of kinship shape the ethos of relationships in the early church? And what is the impact? Looking from another point of view, what is the impact of the early Christian proclamation on natural households and natural kinship relations? We'll see that just as 1 Peter, from beginning to end, reflected the values of honor and shame, it also reflects very, very clearly the value of kinship, the ethos of kinship, using household as a primary



metaphor for thinking about the church and its inner relationships.

This is Dr. David deSilva in his teaching on The Cultural World of the New Testament.  
This is session 5, Family and Household.