

# Gospelized Harmony in the Home

## Romans 14

January 24, 2021  
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Are you enjoying our Family Month so far? I am and I'm loving this Gospelized theme. We have looked at the Gospelized family. A family whose purpose is to showcase the gospel in the ethos of their home. The gospelized husband and wife have their identities in Christ first and their identities in their marriage second. This doesn't mean they love each other less; it means they love each other better. Again, Romans 12:1 (NIV), "*in view of God's mercy [Romans 1-11], offer your bodies as a living sacrifice.*" All I am all for God's glory, including my home and family.

My assumption is that every healthy Christian home sincerely wants it to be gospelized. The challenge is doing it. How do we showcase the gospel in the day-to-day of life? One evidence of a gospelized home is gospel-enabled harmony. Family harmony is not fairy tale harmony: *and they lived happily ever after*. Family harmony sounds more like a 7<sup>th</sup> grade band concert where sometimes they actually play the right note but often they don't. All the wrong notes somehow make the occasional right notes sound all the better. Family harmony is a daily struggle with the dissonance of sin and selfishness.

Let's think about what causes disharmony. Generally, these causes are on a spectrum. On one side are the small annoyances that living with other human beings always entail. No matter who they are or how well you know each other or how much you love each other, every family member is sometimes annoying.

On the other end of the spectrum we have hard core sins done against each other. These are also unavoidable because one thing you can count on from sinners is that they will sin. Often, our family members seem to us to be the worst sinners we know. Why? We know them best and see them at their worst. They see us at our worst, too.

I'm told the most dangerous calls police make, the ones they really dread, aren't the burglar calls or the high-speed chases, but the domestic disturbances. Often cops walk into a powder keg ready to go off. Families NOT in harmony are explosive. The first recorded murder was brother killing brother. Family life has been a kind of reality TV show ever since.

We can say, *that's just the way it is*. But not if there is a way to gospelize the home. Sin is a divider and destroyer. But Jesus is the Prince of Peace. The flesh is egocentric but the Christian is theocentric, gospel-centric, Christocentric. Romans 1:16 (ESV) says that the gospel is "*the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.*" Why is the significant? By the power of the gospel, the family of God unites peoples who historically hated each other—Jews and Gentiles.

What God does in the family of God, the gospel can do in your family. Too many families don't access the resources the gospel provides. We are looking at two resources in particular from Romans: the inverted pyramid from Romans 14, and the gospel power of forgiveness.

### **The Inverted Pyramid – Romans 14 and Harmony in the Church Family**

If you were with us last fall, we spent a lot of time in Romans 14. This is Paul's guide for harmony in a racially and culturally diverse church at Rome. They were all committed to the gospel, but there were huge differences in other areas. Paul calls these in Romans 14:1,

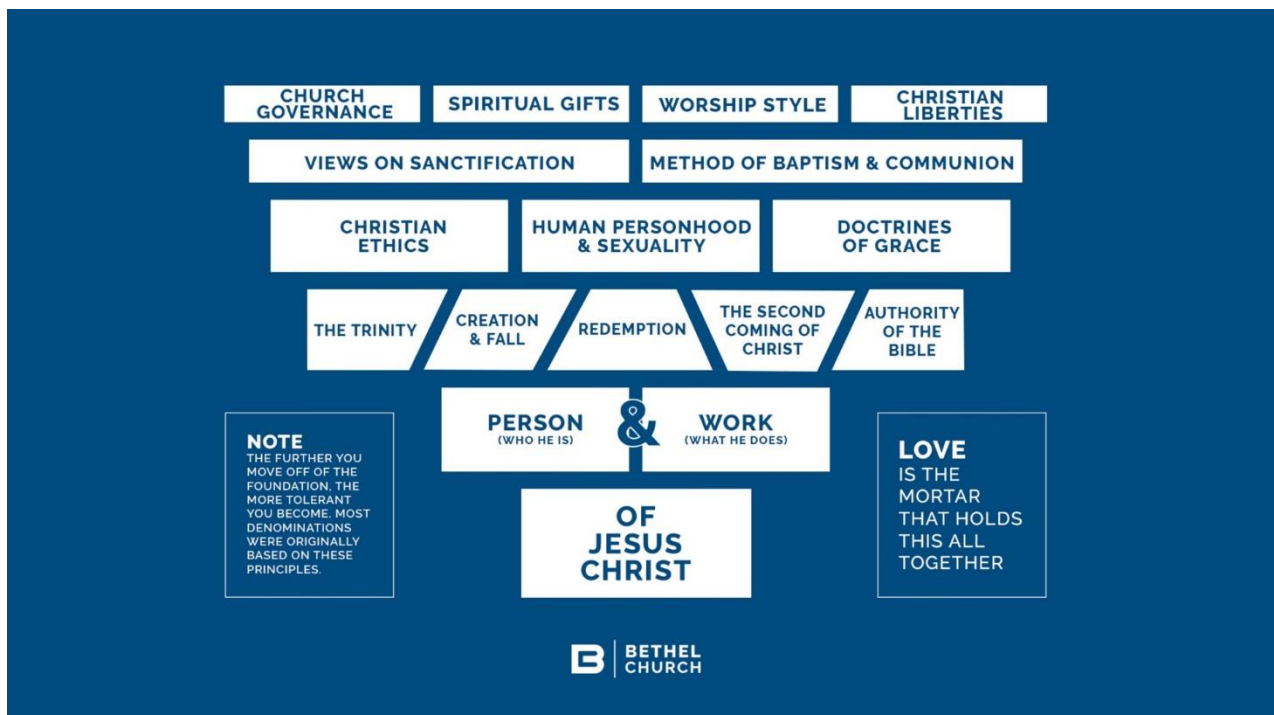
"disputable matters" (NIV). In other words, not core gospel doctrines; that's Romans 1-11. Rather, these are different liberty and lifestyle choices people make. What does Paul urge?

*"Therefore let us not pass judgment on one another any longer.... For if your brother is grieved by what you eat, you are no longer walking in love.... For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking but of righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.... So then let us pursue what makes for peace and for mutual upbuilding" (Romans 14:13ff.).*

Paul urges the Roman Christians to NOT prioritize their lifestyles or liberties but to prioritize loving one another and deferring to each other for the sake of unity. Again, not deferring on doctrinal majors but deferring on interpersonal differences.

*"May the God of endurance and encouragement grant you to live in such harmony with one another, in accord with Christ Jesus, that together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ" (Romans 15:5-6).*

Out of this we presented the *Inverted Pyramid*:



This is now familiar to you. At the foundation you have the shared and unwavering commitment to the person and work of Jesus. On this foundation are essential doctrines (this is not exhaustive; many other things would fit here). Above the essential are really important ones. And the further you go up the pyramid, these are important but plenty of folks will be in heaven someday who disagree with your position. There are other models of this. *The ESV Study Bible* gives tiers of doctrine from Absolutes to Convictions to Opinions to Questions. That's saying the same thing.

Here's my point: this is not only a biblical path to unity in the church, it is absolutely necessary for harmony in the home. What do I mean? Every home has a pyramid of priorities and values. Spend time with any family and these eventually shine through. Or think about how you would describe the home you grew up in. What was important? What was most important? Maybe hard work. Fun. Love. Making money. Achievement. The Cubs! These

values are often unwritten and maybe unstated, but the family instinctively operates according to these values. Every family needs these values to provide the necessary operational requirements to keep the home functioning. It's the glue.

A gospelized family functions in the day-to-day according to the values of the kingdom of God. It derives its functional purpose from the gospel itself. The bottom layer of a Christian family looks identical to the bottom layer of a Christian church. The person and work of Jesus should be the foundation of our homes. By foundation, I mean a shared supreme value and priority of loving him and glorifying him in our home. Just like our church. *Are you saying that "All about Him" isn't just for the church, that's supposed to be for our home too?* Yes. Yes. Yes!

Why? Because he alone is worthy. But a byproduct of valuing Jesus and his gospel is that it provides a daily mechanism for harmony, just like it does in a church. In the church, we get off the level of core doctrines and there are varying opinions and emphases and giftings and personal passions and preferences. How does a church harmonize with so much diversity? By keeping the main thing the main thing. Our mutual and unwavering commitment to Christ unites us when these other preferences would otherwise divide us. What I'm urging today is to follow that model culturally in your home. This is true if you are married or single, kids or not, grandkids or not. This applies to everyone.

What unites a family is certainly physical DNA. But what unites a Christian family is spiritual DNA. Gospel DNA. Jesus-is-king-and-Lord-of-this-home DNA. Does this mean your kids all grow up and become missionaries or even Christians? Does this guarantee harmony? No. No more than it guarantees this in a church. Plenty of churches erupt in division. But if there is ever going to be sustainable unity, churches and families need a uniting vision and purpose.

What is the point of our family? When the gospel is the point and Jesus' glory is the goal, the byproduct is that God provides spiritual resources and blessing in a home that is trying to serve him and glorify him. Displace God and enthrone education or your kids' sports career as the functional god of your home and see what happens.

One tip here. Since this is so important, why not write out a purpose statement for your home? You may say, *that sounds silly*. Yet people do this all the time and hang banners in their home that say, *Live, Laugh, Love*. I would recommend you not get your vision for your family from Walmart. *I got mine from Hobby Lobby*. Well then that's different.... We are all for living, laughing, and loving. Feel free to keep that on the wall.



I'm encouraging you to aim higher. If not on the wall, certainly the wall of your heart. Joshua said it well, "*As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord*" (Joshua 24:15). Or you've probably heard, *love God, love people*. Or Micah 6:8, "*act justly...love mercy...and walk humbly with your God*" (NIV) Our church's statement is *Bethel Church exists to make disciples whose lives are all about Him*.

My brother in law's family took this seriously and painted the list right on their wall in the stairwell where it would be seen every day (see picture at left). These need to be biblical, aspirational, and they should call your family upward to a higher love, God-honoring choices, and kingdom of God priority living.

How does this help with harmony? When you have the right thing as the main uniting thing, it allows diversity in a family in the lesser priorities. Now you can discuss but you don't have to argue. The family zone is a safe zone to disagree. Discuss. Laugh. There can be differing opinions on music and the arts and politics and a host of other perspectives, yet we love each other. The gospel provides a glue. Get the foundation right and you tend to get the others right too.

### **The Gospel Comes with an Eraser**

I'd like you to imagine that this is a wedding. A wedding officiated by Pastor Steve DeWitt. If you've been to a wedding I've done, you have likely heard me talk about the gospel eraser in marriage. I do so in nearly every wedding I do. I plan to continue. Here's what I say.

You both look great. Bride, you are a beautiful bride. Dude, you're not as beautiful but OK too. I know you both want a beautiful marriage. Like a piece of art. Do you know the most important tool every artist has? An eraser. They've done infrared scans of Da Vincis and Rembrandts and they can detect lines that were drawn and erased. To draw a great painting, it takes a lot of erasing.

What kind of erasing does marriage require? Mostly the forgiving type. Erasing insensitive words said. Oops! Let's erase that from the painting. But then there's the critical word, the grumpy attitude, the failure to honor the other, unmet expectations or desires. Your success in your marriage will largely depend on how well you forgive each other.

Here is where the gospel is so key to a healthy marriage. The gospel, like a number 2 pencil, comes with an eraser. The gospel in marriage assumes very significant failures to love each other as you are committing to do so today.

Then I'll often tell the story from Matthew 18 of the steward who owed the king 10 billion dollars. The king canceled the man's debt entirely. The man then walked out and saw a man who owed him \$10. He grabbed him and shook him violently demanding he repay the \$10. The king heard about it, summoned the man, and said, *I forgave you the massive debt and you couldn't forgive the \$10 debt?* He reinstated the debt and threw the man in jail.

What's the point? A Christian is someone who has been forgiven much more than a \$10 billion debt by God. An infinite and unpayable moral debt was owed. Yet God paid our moral debt by the death of Jesus and redeemed us to a complete righteous standing before him (justification, Romans 3-4).

In marriage you are going to constantly have these \$10 debts against each other. These daily offenses and slights, even major marital sins against each other. The Christian husband or wife, in view of God's incredible mercy, extends grace and erases that \$10 debt. If not, marriage and family are a compounding pile of hurts and slights and offenses that are never resolved. Then the cops walk into your powder keg.

*But the gospel comes with an eraser.*

That's my wedding message. Now an example from my own marriage. Jennifer has heard me do many a wedding ceremony. Well, at some point this past fall, Jennifer and I were in a tiff with each other. I know that's shocking to you. I honestly don't even remember what it was, and isn't that often the case? We remember the conflict but not the reason for it. It'd been a pretty frosty week between us, and we were at loggerheads. Pretty much stuck. She was mad. I was mad. We were both mad. How will this marital pressure cooker ever be released?

I got up early one morning and I went into my home office and on my desk was this box. Little pink bow. I knew instantly who it was from. Jennifer likes pink bows. I opened the box and inside I found this. An eraser. What did that eraser mean? She was referring to my wedding message and was communicating that from her side, she was erasing the offense. We had a sweet makeup over it and on we went in harmony. That's the power of the forgiving eraser.

This is absolutely critical for harmony in the home. Otherwise, you have to be perfect every day. Who can live that way? But the gospelized home has an eraser. A Christian husband or wife or son or daughter may not be awesome at forgiving but will be pretty good. Might take a while to get there, may need a time out first, but that \$10 billion debt God forgave will eventually compel you to apply said gospel to the family offense.

To help with this concept of erasing, we bought boxes of erasers that we will hand out as you leave. One per household. We want you to put this eraser somewhere very prominent in your house. Make it the centerpiece of your kitchen table. Tape it to the front of your TV during football viewing. Wherever. In fact, we'd love you to take a picture and tag Bethel Church and Ministries on your Facebook page. The whole community will wonder what's up and we can explain how the gospel helps at home. Who knows how God might use it? We might overtake Bernie Sanders memes on the Internet.

Here's the deal. Have the eraser there for at least the next seven days as a reminder that the gospelized home has an eraser and ask, *what around here might need some erasing?* Some of you might need to take two or twenty of them. Lots of erasing needed. If you are online, dig one out and do the same in your home.

Put it there. Force it into the awkward frosty thing you are dealing with. Extend forgiveness as an expression of your life on the altar to God. Do it for God's glory. And just see if a week of active relational erasing doesn't produce more harmony in your marriage and in your family. And more happiness too. A gospelized home has Jesus and the gospel as its main thing and the eraser is ever ready to clear the air and harmonize the home.

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