

The Gospelized Family

Romans 12:1-2

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It's finally January 2021. For many years we have taken the month of January and focused our teaching on marriage, and practical teaching on matters related to the home. We will return to Romans in February and finish our exposition of Romans in May.

This is our last Family Month during the Romans series. While we are still in this wonderful book on the gospel, it seemed the right time to purposefully connect the gospel with our homes and families. Our deepest dive into the gospel should produce some incredibly practical and helpful application to marriage, parenting, and family relationships. Today's message is an introduction to our month of messages.

If we are going to connect the gospel with family life, let's quickly remind ourselves of what Romans has taught us about the gospel in the first place.

Romans in Review

What is the gospel? Romans 1, the wrath of God is against us for our sin; our rebellious worship of created things rather than our creator. We all far short of God's glory and are justly condemned forever. Yet, God purposed to make things right between God and man by justifying the unrighteous through Jesus' death on the cross (chapter 3). Jesus died as our propitiation, satisfying God's wrath. Nobody is saved by their own merit, not even Abraham (chapter 4). If Abraham needed justification, then certainly we do, too. Faith in Jesus is the means by which God declares us righteous. The result, chapter 5, is that we have peace with God through Jesus. This is God's grace which frees us from the bondage to sin and frees us NOT to sin. How? Union with Jesus breaks the ongoing power of sin. Such love, sovereign love (chapter 8), such grace, sovereign grace (chapter 9)! Grace that continues to have a plan and purpose for the Jews even as the gospel opens wide the door for all humanity to believe and be saved (chapters 10-11)!

Chapter 12 is the important pivot from the vertical gospel to the horizontal gospel. *"I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice"* (Romans 12:1). What follows is five more chapters of putting the vertical gospel into practice in horizontal human relationships. First, to fellow Christians in the church. Then our relationship to governmental authorities (chapter 13). And most recently, how to keep the gospel the main thing with Christians who make different lifestyle choices in non-essential areas (chapter 14). Paul urges harmony in Christ in spite of differences of opinion. What's at stake? *"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).

You may be thinking, *I didn't hear anything about family in there! That was mostly theology. My marriage needs help. My relationship with my sister is terrible. Our home is relational chaos. Are you telling me the gospel has something to say about that?*

Not only does it have something to say, Romans 1:16 says *"the gospel...is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes."* That power is saving power but also the redeeming power our homes and families desperately need. The gospel faithfully applied in the day-to-

day of life is the only hope for lasting spiritual and cultural family change. A family or a husband or a wife who is astonished at the sovereign grace of God through Christ is a powerful agent of change in the home.

Here are a few ground rules for the whole series...

Ground Rules

Grace not guilt

Whenever you talk about marriage or parenting or family life, many people are already loaded up with guilt about failures and ongoing problems. The starting point here is grace, not guilt. The gospel is built on grace for guilt. That leads to ground rule #2...

It's OK to not be OK; just don't stay that way

This isn't original with me, but it says it well. Truth be told, none of us have family figured out and one thing about being family is you know where the bodies are buried (figuratively speaking). If your drive home after these messages consists of family members pointing out each other's failures or how they should have been listening when Pastor Steve said...that is not healthy. Rather than thinking about how much other family members need to change, let's all come to this wanting ourselves to change and being willing to—even if nobody else does.

All our families have skeletons in the closet, situations of severe dysfunction, and seasons of struggle. It's OK to not be OK, but let's not give in to that, but rather access God's saving power to redeem our homes.

The Family Verses of Romans

Unlike many of Paul's other letters, in Romans he never teaches directly on marriage and the family. There is nothing like he does in Ephesians or Colossians or 1 Corinthians. But that doesn't mean Romans doesn't have something to say about family. There are two verses in particular and they happen to be back to back.

"For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen" (Romans 11:36).

This verse is an all-encompassing statement of God's purpose for everything and in everything. It's all from him, through him, and to him. "Him" is Jesus. It's all for his glory. *It's all about him.* What in your family or home isn't included in "all things?" Your family is for his glory. If you are married, your marriage is for his glory. When it's not, then, as Romans 3:23 says, *we are falling short of the glory of God.* We are falling short of God's intention for all things everywhere to glorify Christ. Every home, family, parent, child, and marriage is meant to be for his glory.

That ends Romans 1-11's deep dive into the vertical gospel. God and man. Notice the enormous pivot in the next verse.

"I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship" (Romans 12:1).

This verse is the massive hinge of Romans. From the vertical to the horizontal. "By the mercies of God." What's that? The mercy of God toward us as sinners as described in chapters 1-11. What are we to do? Present our bodies as living sacrifices. This harkens to the Old Testament Levitical practice in the temple of killing bulls and goats and placing them on the altar as a sacrifice or offering to God. They did so by the hundreds of thousands of animals over centuries. Yet, all that time, there was one thing all the sacrificial animals had in common—they were all dead. They were dead sacrifices.

Paul uses that powerful image and says that as Christians we now have the privilege of offering ourselves as *living* sacrifices. For an animal to be a temple sacrifice required a total commitment by the animal. It was all the goat or all the bull. All their body. All their blood. Now we as Christians, in view of God's amazing saving grace to us, place all that we are on the altar to God. We are sacrifices who are still living.

"Holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship."

Our acceptability before God is purely based on Jesus' work on our behalf. We are holy and acceptable to God because of Jesus and his atoning death on the cross. Still, like the sacrificial animals, all that we are is to be offered entirely to God as worship. It's a transformative truth when the lightbulb goes on for a new Christian that now everything in life is theology, everything is for God, all your life can be lived for his glory. Whether you eat or drink, do it all to the glory of God. Your whole life can be offered to God as worship.

But this is family month. My burden and the point of this whole series is that our homes and the relationships represented in the family are part of Romans 12:1. Could we read it this way?

I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your families as a living sacrifice, present your marriage as a living sacrifice, present your sibling relationships as a living sacrifice...which is your spiritual act of worship.

In this we must realize that of all the horizontal relationships the power of the gospel can transform, the closest ones represent the most challenging and the most rewarding. The most redeeming. The most sanctifying. The most God-glorifying. Is God glorified when we help the old lady we don't know across the street? Yes. But he is more glorified when, in the midst of conflict, as an act of worship to God, we do the dishes. He is even more glorified when, in view of his mercy to me, I show mercy to a family member and forgive the offense against me. Why? Why would I do such a thing? The gospel. God's glory. It's all about him.

What are we calling a Romans 12:1 applying family?

The Gospelized Family

We could have called this series *The Kingdom of God Family* or *The God-Centered Family* or *The All About Him Home*. But we are going with *The Gospelized Family*. The gospelized husband or wife. The gospelized sibling.

How is something gospelized? ***When my posture at home is in view of God's mercy to me as an act of worship to him.*** Isn't that Romans 12? "*By the mercies of God...present your bodies as a living sacrifice...which is your spiritual act of worship.*"

We typically have this backwards. We think, *I must bring my family to church*. While that's a good thing, that's only once a week. A much more effective way to redeem your family is to bring church and the gospel to your family the other six days of the week.

How do I Gospelize My Home?

I gospelize my home when I view it within God's redemptive story

There are all these narratives out there vying to be the one that you view as the explanation for everything including the purpose of marriage and family. Some dominant ones in our culture include materialism or naturalism; family and marriage is a survival construct. It is how it is because humanity needed it this way to evolve. Or secularism which removes any transcendent definition; this allows for unbiblical definitions of gender and so called same-sex marriage. All these are narratives and explanations are out there, especially when it comes to marriage, family, sexuality, and gender. Bookstores and Amazon are filled with books describing what marriage is and how the home should look.

A gospelized family is one where God's Word and God's redemptive story are intentionally the guiding one for the home. Definitions and roles are according to what the Bible says. The goal of the home is to live under the redemptive reign of Christ. A gospelized home sees itself as part of the grand narrative of God's purpose in salvation. If single, be single to the glory of God. If married, be married to the glory of God. If parents, then parent to the glory of God. God's story is the story of God's glory. This glory story has four chapters and the gospelized family sees itself within this plot:

Creation – What my family should be like

God created marriage and the family. Even Jesus turned to this chapter to answer the question of marriage and divorce:

"He answered, 'Have you not read that he who created them from the beginning made them male and female, and said, 'Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh'? So they are no longer two but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate'" (Matthew 19:4-6).

Jesus answers the question about God's intent for marriage by looking back at creation to God's purpose in the first place.

When your house is a mess and your marriage is in conflict and your kids are playing on the roof, do you ever ask yourself, *is this what it's supposed to be like? How do we know?* Creation, Genesis 1-2, tells us God's design for the family.

Fall – What my family is actually like

Genesis 3 tells how the only perfectly and happily married couple ever blew it up. When Adam and Eve sinned, it corrupted all family relationships. Eve accuses Adam of failing to lead. Adam blames Eve for refusing to follow. Cain murders his brother Abel. And off we go all the way to your crazy family and mine. Not only does the Fall explain what your family is like, it tells why it is the way it is. Not that everything is terrible, but compared to what it could be in holy perfection, even the best family is living in the shadows.

Sin is a destroyer. Sin explains the deep hurt family relationships often create. After Genesis 3, every marriage is a sinner married to a sinner. Every family is sinful parents parenting

very sinful children. Siblings are sinners permanently tied by DNA to other sinners. Might that explain last week in your house?

A gospelized home requires a realistic and theological expectation on the other sinners in the house. Forget Disney fairy tales. Marriage to a sinner is hard, unless they are a pastor...then it's ever harder...

If the story stopped there, it would be a tragedy. But here's where it gets good....

Redemption/Salvation – what my family could be like

Praise God Jesus came and died for our sins. Praise God that the gospel is the power of God unto salvation for all who believe. This power reconciles us vertically with God. But don't forget Romans 12:1! The gospel moves horizontally as well and is a powerful and transforming agent in human relationships.

When the reign of Jesus takes over a marriage and both spouses submit to his Lordship, guess what happens to the marriage? When Mom or Dad live out the reign of Jesus as spouse or parent, what happens to the culture of the home? Christians are ministers of reconciliation. Sinners are peace breakers. Christians are peacemakers as God's grace to us creates a capacity to be gracious to the sinner I'm married to and the child I'm parent to and the sibling I'm related to and even crazy Aunt Lulu at the family reunion.

Consummation – What my forever family will be like

The final chapter is God's reign through Jesus as absolute ruler. Every knee bows and every tongue confesses Jesus as Lord. Those who trust in Jesus as Savior in this life live forever with him in the next life. As important as our earthly family is to us, in eternity, that identity is superseded by our identity as adopted members of the family of God. God's house is our house. His family is our family. Jesus' inheritance is our inheritance. The best family is the fully and perfectly redeemed family of God to come. God's family is a gospelized family.

Creation. Fall. Redemption. Consummation. The gospelized family happily sees itself in that story and applies that story to the day-to-day of life. The ideal in creation. The reality in the Fall. The redemption in Jesus. The hope in eternal life.

"This...shows how this wonderful story intersects with the story of your family. The Bible story can become the story of what God designed your family to be, what goes wrong in your family and how God can put your family right again through His Son, Jesus." (Chester and Moll)¹

I don't care how broken your current marriage or family situation—it is not too broken for the power of the gospel to save it. We have seen that here over and over. Take heart.

We gospelize our home by gospelizing our side of the relationship

If there's a key to all this, we must get rid of our victim mentality or our bitterness from the past or our pride that requires the other family member to take the first step. There's only one member of the marriage or the family you have any control over. There's only one family member who has any hope of bringing a gospelizing influence to your home. You

¹ Tim Chester and Ed Moll, *Gospel Centered Family: Becoming the Parents God Wants You to Be* (Charlotte, NC: Good Book Company, 2014), 5.

guessed it—it's you. Every relationship has two sides. You're in charge of one side. Make that side as Romans 12:1 as it can be. Gospelize it. See yourself in God's story, living under Jesus' reign, and treat that other family member as thoroughly "gospely" as you possibly can. Apply gospel grace, gospel mercy, gospel forgiveness, gospel sacrifice, gospel covenant, and unconditional gospel love. Take the first step. Start today. To the extent you can, gospelize your home.

I think I hear you asking, *but how do I do that? I need some practical help.* How to do it is the rest of January starting next week with the gospelized husband.

May God gospelize our hearts and gospelize our homes. Amen.

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