

The Gospelized Husband

Romans 12:1

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While today's message is aimed at Christian husbands, it has application to all of us in one way or another. If you are a Christian, no matter your gender or marital status, we will be talking about Jesus and his church today, so that includes you. If you are single and desiring marriage, what sort of husband should you be or should you look for? If you are a wife, a gospelized husband is both your prayer and your opportunity to nurture. If your husband isn't a Christian, we can pray he will receive Christ as his Savior and become the gospelized husband. If you are a husband, this message is squarely for you today.

Wives, I'm going to be watching carefully. I have told the camera operators to zoom in on any wife elbowing her husband during any part of this message. All the world will know. Get ready because next week is *The Gospelized Wife*. Might be a good week to stay humble. If your spouse or family members are not Christians, in a few weeks, our whole message will be, *Help When There isn't Much Gospel at Home*. Stay encouraged.

This is our second message in our Family Month series entitled, *The Gospelized Family*. How does the vertical gospel of God saving sinners change the horizontal relationships in the home? Husband and wife. Parents and children. Brothers and sisters.

I get it from many places, but specifically the book of Romans. Eleven chapters of deep gospel explanation of how God reconciles himself to sinners. Then five chapters all about human relationships and applying the vertical gospel to the horizontal. The massive hinge from vertical to horizontal is Romans 12:1,

"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 ESV).

Bodies on the altar is emblematic of the complete us, all that we are, in view of God's mercy to me, offered to God as worship. **When my posture at home is in view of God's mercy to me as an act of worship to him.** That was last week's message...

What does this mean for the Christian husband in the home? How does a husband gospelize his husbanding and his home?

For 11 chapters Paul explains in Romans how a Christian husband is a sinner made righteous positionally before God. This is by faith in Jesus' atoning work on the cross. We start here because a gospelized husband must first be a justified sinner. He must receive the love of God by the grace of God through faith in the Son of God. All of this is summarized in 12:1 as *"the mercies of God."* *"I appeal to you to...by the mercies of God."* Then it says, *"present your bodies as a living sacrifice."* It's gospel first, husband second.

The Gospel is HIS Core Identity

This is critical. Christian first. Husband second. If those are switched, we will only apply the gospel as long as it serves my desires in my marriage. And haven't many men tried this? *My wife wants me in church. I'm supposed to lead spiritually. If it will keep her from nagging*

me, then I'll go along with it. How long does that last? Single ladies, beware of a similar pattern in boyfriends.

Right away we are at one of the real challenges in the church today—husbands who add the gospel to their identity rather than having the gospel as their core identity. Too many men look in the mirror, and rather than seeing a sinner saved by grace, they see themselves as a businessman or an educated man or a sports fanatic or collector or a thousand other identities that are most important to them. Even husband or father as a core identity will miss the point. I'm urging husbands to not see themselves as a husband Christian but a Christian husband. Not a father Christian but a Christian father.

What's your core identity? Who do you see yourself to be? Becoming a Christian pushes down these other priorities and enthrones Christ in my life. Now Jesus is my starting point for everything. *"The Good News is not just a series of facts to which we yield our assent but a dramatic narrative that replots our identity."* (Horton)¹

Being a true follower of Jesus is radical. To give you an idea, hear Jesus himself, *"If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple"* (Luke 14:26).

This doesn't sound very Family month appropriate. *You must hate your wife!* Unless you understand what Jesus is actually saying. To be his disciple requires a radical reorientation of the heart priorities of your life. What's the normal priority list? Love your family. Love your wife. Love your kids. That's what you expect to hear during Family Month.

New Life in Christ reorients even the natural familial loves with an overarching and higher love for Christ. It's not that we hate our wives. It's that our love for Christ is far greater than our love for our wives. ***This doesn't make us love our wives less, it makes us love them better.***

A gospelized husband has his love list rightly ordered and his allegiance and devotion to Jesus is the greatest devotion of his life, even over wife and kids.

Dear sisters, please hear me. This is an important truth for any potential future wives who are here. That is, if you are a Christian yourself and desire a Christian marriage. Singles. Our teenage girls. What do you want in a husband? What are you looking for? What are you attracted to? Your attractions will say something about the maturity of your own spiritual life. I'm urging you to look for a gospelized man. Is he gospelized? How do you know?

How is the gospel on display in your relationship already? A gospelized husband is one who understands his role is to promote spiritual purity in his wife, like Jesus sanctifies the church, his bride. Is this man you are dating treating you honorably? Is he guarding your purity, sexually? Spiritually? If he is not a gospelized boyfriend, he will not be a gospelized husband. Find yourself the most gospelized man you can. Short, tall, wide, skinny, rich, poor—doesn't matter. Is he gospelized?

Boyfriends and future boyfriends here, if you can't gospelize a dating relationship, there is no hope of you gospelizing a marriage. Dating is kindergarten stuff compared to marriage. Marriage quickly ushers you into PhD challenges. Better to stay single. I know one crazy guy who did until he was 44 years old.

¹ Michael Horton as quoted by Robert W. Kellemen and Deepak Reju, *Gospel Centered Counseling* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2014), 205.

A gospelized husband has the gospel of Christ as his core priority and identity. Identity is incredibly important, but what's a Christian husband to do? How does he function in marriage and in the home?

Gospel Reenactment

Are you familiar with reenactments? I have a friend who is seriously into military reenactments. He invited me to join him at Buckley Homestead for a WWII reenactment (see the picture below).



Grown men dressing up and playing soldiers. I was surprised at the seriousness these men take. Everything had to be authentic. Some took it really seriously—ate only what the soldiers would have ate, slept overnight outside. That wasn't me. I had to leave early to preach at our Saturday night service. Who showed up for the service but my whole rifle squad! Band of Brothers!

Reenactment: when you look, act, and model yourself after the actions of someone else. Here is how Paul explains what a gospelized husband is,

"Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any

such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish. In the same way husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ does the church” (Ephesians 5:25–29).

Like WWII reenactors carefully follow the patterns of WWII soldiers, every Christian husband is called by God in that relationship to be a reenactor. Of what? The way Christ leads and loves the church.

Loved the church (Ephesians 5:25)

Gave himself for the church (Ephesians 5:25)

Cleanses the church (Ephesians 5:26)

Presents the church in splendor – holy and blemish free (Ephesians 5:27)

Nourishes and cherishes the church (Ephesians 5:29)

The gospelized husband is a Christian man married to a woman whose primary goal in the relationship is to reenact Christ’s covenantal love for the church.

Christ and the church are not an illustration of marriage. Marriage by God’s design is an incarnational picture of the gospel, the relationship between Jesus and the church. To be clear, a Christian husband is reenacting Jesus. The Christian wife is reenacting the church.

I can hear the husband now: *I’m not acting like I’m somebody else! Unless someone asks me to play war and I get to carry a gun, then I’m all in.* For a Christian man whose core identity is the gospel, to reenact the gospel—to get to play Jesus’ role—is a high honor. Men, if that’s not an honor to you, I’d suggest your core identity is something other your relationship with Jesus. Check your heart. Is Jesus at the periphery?

Essentially, this requires a husband to consciously bring to mind the example of Jesus and purposefully respond as best we can like Jesus would. *Pastor Steve, are you saying I should actually think about the gospel when she’s yelling at me? Think about the gospel when I’ve done an oopsy-daisy?*

It is especially helpful when marriage is hard. Those are the moments when steadfast covenantal love is showcased the most. What would Jesus do with this? How would he respond? Is this easy? No. Trust me, I’m in the battle with you guys. My flesh doesn’t want me to reenact Jesus. In my frustration, the things of God seem distant. But, as Romans 7 tells us, I have another power in me by the Holy Spirit, urging holy husbanding in the ups and downs of life.

Gospelizing my husbanding is hugely advantageous for success as a husband. The qualities that make for a healthy marriage are inherent in the gospel and therefore, in the gospelized husband. These qualities are Christ-like qualities, and in the expression of them, the reenactment occurs. Like what?

The Qualities of a Gospelized Husband

Gospelized husbands aspire to love sacrificially: reenact the cross

By nature, men are utterly self-centered. And the women said? *Amen.* We are. Let’s admit it. A non-gospelized husband approaches marriage with the expectation of getting what he wants out of it. What do we want? We want you ladies to admire us as much as we admire us. Here is where marriage is a brick wall. Self-centeredness does not produce the wifely

admiration we desire. It doesn't produce amorous wives every night. It does the opposite, and creates many painful problems. When my core identity is me, my marriage and my wife are tools I use for sex or ego advancement or domination. If you marry a man whose character is formed around those priorities, your marriage is going to tank. Why?

"*Marriage amplifies what a person is.*"² Both good and bad. If you are a little selfish, in marriage, you're a lot selfish. If you are a little grumpy, in marriage, you're a lot grumpy. But it works to the positive, if when you are single, you are kind, in marriage there are a thousand opportunities every day to display kindness. If you are joyful, marriage provides many contexts for that joy to bless. Marriage amplifies what a person is. If that person is a man whose core identity is the gospel, marriage amplifies gospel qualities and puts them on display. That's the point. Every marriage is a showcase, an amplification of who we really are.

If at the core of who we are, is a firm belief that I am a sinner saved by grace, that identity will shape my words and actions around the example of Jesus' sacrificial love to the church.

Gospelized husbands take their leadership seriously: reenact servant leadership

Can anyone accuse Jesus of sloughing off? Being a couch potato Messiah? Of course not. His leadership of the church is without question. His leadership is not domineering or selfish. Rather, he leads by serving. He gave us the paradigm when he took up the basin and towel and washed the disciples' feet. Spiritually, he has been washing our feet ever since. For a gospelized husband, love and leading looks like serving. Yes, we believe the husband is the head of the wife. Says so right here in Ephesians 5. But that headship is a call to serve. This requires humility, something we men don't naturally admire. This is the meekness of Jesus. Strength under control. Strength channeled toward serving the wife.

I have found this one of the greatest challenges of being a husband. It's hard to do because my natural self wants to be served, not to serve.

Gospelized husbands are really good at forgiving: reenact justification

If there is anything the gospel showcases it is the love of God to forgive us for our sins. Romans 5:1 says, "*Therefore...we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.*" The gospel is a message of peace and reconciliation. You would think a Christian marriage would be a perpetual peace treaty.

I have not found that to be the case. Marriage is a daily opportunity to be offended or to be offensive. These come in big and small ways. I could list my failures in this, but I don't have time to list them all here. 😊

My point is that a gospelized husband whose core identity is the gospel of God's forgiveness is going to be quite good at forgiving. Not perfect. Maybe not even awesome. But pretty good.

I've been married 8.5 years so my experience is limited, but the ability to forgive may be the single greatest skill needed for a healthy marriage. Communication is important. Having fun is important. Love and intimacy are important. But all of those require resolving conflict and forgiveness or you never enjoy marital blessings. You have to smoke the peace pipe nearly every day.

² Douglas Wilson, *Reforming Marriage* (Moscow, ID: Canon Press, 1995), 34.

Singles desiring marriage, I don't know what's on your must-have list. Must love dogs. Must hate the Packers. Having been married awhile, I'd put "good at forgiving" in my top three. Since marriage amplifies who we are and a gospelized man is a man who gets the amazing forgiveness God has bestowed to him, a gospelized husband desires to be quick to forgive and to not hold offenses against his wife. Wives, this goes both ways.

Can you see how the gospel provides the resources of character required to be a pretty good husband? I love this quote, "*The gospel welcomes us to be honest because it offers divine aid for everything we would need to be honest about.*" (Tripp)³

Christian husbands, you have in the gospel and the power of the Holy Spirit in you, the very resources you need to succeed as a husband. Have you tried that? How about this week, in a fresh way, consciously think, the love of Christ? The service of Christ. The servant leadership of Christ. The forgiveness of Christ. God help me to reenact the gospel in my husbanding.

I can hear you say, *but my wife, she ain't like the church is to Jesus. Maybe I'll start modeling Jesus when she starts doing her part.* Did Jesus wait for the church to love him? Jesus loved first. It's one more way to reflect the gospel. Love her anyway.

A word to the wives here. Your husband might be scared to death to try anything I've said here for fear of upsetting the status quo. He may fear your smirk or a sense that now you've won. If he is brave enough to try, could you be brave enough to accept his less than perfect trying? Don't say, *you didn't say it right! Billy Graham would have said it differently. You took too long! I sensed some self-justification in your confession. To the doghouse you go!*

Your husband is reenacting Jesus without being Jesus. He's a flawed picture of our perfect Savior and you are a flawed picture of the sanctified church.

So, do your marriage a favor. Show your man some of the grace this week you want him to show you after next week's message and you both will be blessed by a more gospelized marriage.

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³ Paul David Tripp, *Lead* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2020), 124.