

# When There Isn't Much Gospel at Home

## 1 Peter 3:1ff

**January 31, 2021**  
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This is our last message of Family Month. Our theme is *The Gospelized Family*. We have been deriving family principles from our series on Romans, especially Romans 12:1 where the Apostle Paul exhorts the vertical gospel of reconciliation with God through faith in Jesus to be applied horizontally in every aspect of our lives. This must include our families, marriages, parenting, and sibling relationships. Our messages have followed in that vein: *The Gospelized Family*. *The Gospelized Husband*. *The Gospelized Wife*. *Gospelized Harmony in the Home*.

If there is a category in our church who may wonder about the relevance of all this, it's the person who is the only Christian in their home, perhaps the only Christian in the marriage, or the only Christian anywhere to be found in the family tree. They would love to have some mutual gospel forgiveness/erasing but the other family member doesn't have a gospel eraser. They can't gospelize the relationship, only their side of it.

How do you gospelize when you are flying solo in your family? Does the Bible have any direction or encouragement? Yes it does.

### Jesus Had Unsaved Family

Let's begin by observing something many people don't realize—Jesus had unsaved family members. I read an interesting article by Jon Bloom that explored this.<sup>1</sup> "*For not even his brothers believed in him*" (John 7:5 ESV). We would like to think that just being close to Jesus would be enough to persuade everyone to believe in him. Clearly, that didn't work with Judas. Nor with his own brothers and family. At one point during Jesus' ministry his family thought he had lost his mind (Mark 3:21). Thankfully, by the time we get to Acts 1, his mother and family are in the Upper Room and obviously believing Jesus is the Messiah. So, it has a happy gospelized ending.

This should keep all of us from being overly confident and overly depressed. No matter how amazing your Christian life is, your family may or may not be inspired to believe. Even Jesus' perfect life lived at home for 30 years didn't automatically win his family to faith in him. God is sovereign over these things. We cannot control or activate the faith of our spouse, siblings, or children. As much as I want my two daughters to be saved, I can't save them. God does the saving and must work in their hearts.

I think it's helpful to realize that when you pray for your prodigal son or daughter or your unsaved loved one, Jesus personally experienced what you are going through and sympathizes with your anguish. More than any other, we want our loved ones to know Christ and eternal life in him. The two texts we will specifically look at today are 1 Corinthians 7:12-14 and 1 Peter 3:1ff. In both, God tells us what to do when we are the only Christian at the dinner table.

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<sup>1</sup> Jon Bloom, "Jesus Also Had Unbelieving Family Members," [www.desiringgod.org](http://www.desiringgod.org), May 25, 2012. <https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/jesus-also-had-unbelieving-family-members>

*"To the rest I say (I, not the Lord) that if any brother has a wife who is an unbeliever, and she consents to live with him, he should not divorce her. If any woman has a husband who is an unbeliever, and he consents to live with her, she should not divorce him. For the unbelieving husband is made holy because of his wife, and the unbelieving wife is made holy because of her husband. Otherwise your children would be unclean, but as it is, they are holy" (1 Corinthians 7:12–14).*

All of 1 Corinthians 7 is about marriage and sex and divorce and related issues. In this portion, Paul addresses a common reality in the early church. As the gospel spread, you had many marriages in which one spouse trusted in Christ but the other didn't. Now what? Paul urges singles to avoid this by marrying only a Christian. But IF you are married to an unbeliever, do you stay or not? Is that a valid reason to bolt? What if the unbelieving spouse abandons the marriage because this new gospelized spouse isn't what he or she signed up for?

Paul says, *believing spouse, stay in your marriage. If the unbeliever leaves, then that's his or her choice. But the Christian spouse is to stay. Why? "For the unbelieving husband is made holy because of his wife, and the unbelieving wife is made holy because of her husband. Otherwise your children would be unclean, but as it is, they are holy" (v. 14).*

What does he mean by *"made holy"*? He repeats it three times and applies it to the unbelieving husband, wife, and children. Clearly it doesn't mean they are saved. That would go against all that Paul has ever written about salvation by personal faith in Jesus. It's not salvation by proximity to a Christian. So then what does *"made holy"* mean?

The sense of it is that the marriage puts the unbelieving spouse under the powerful influence of the gospel lived out through the believing spouse. Living with a Christian can be and should be a compelling witness to them, and may lead them to saving faith. Paul says, remain in the marriage for the sake of the eternity of your spouse. Your presence and life will keep the gospel on his radar and hopefully lead him to believe.

Not just the spouse, stay there for the sake of the children too. *"Otherwise your children would be unclean, but as it is, they are holy" (v. 14).* Even one parent who is a Christian is sufficient for those kids to have an up close and personal encounter with Christ. Paul says this kind of gospel encounter is a powerful witness, and God can use that to bring the children to saving faith. But there are no guarantees just like there is no guarantee that two Christian parents will have the joy of passing their faith on to their kids.

The assumption here is that the saved family member is sufficiently displaying their faith that the spouse and the children will see what real Christianity looks like. Praise God for so many in our church who are living in this tension every day. It can be a very effective missional influence.

My two best friends growing up, grew up with moms who were faithful Christians and dads who were not. I personally observed their moms shouldering the entire burden of discipling the kids, bringing the kids to church, Awana, VBS, high school student ministries. The dads weren't hostile, they just weren't interested. Mrs. Hundley and Mrs. Woodbury bore all the spiritual load.

The result? Today my friend Matt pastors a church in Albert Lea, Minnesota. He is possibly preaching a sermon right now. And my friend Brian is a key leader in a megachurch in Minneapolis. Both of their dads died fairly young and both of them became Christians before they died. Humanly speaking, how do you suppose that happened? Faithful Christian wives

raising faithful Christian kids who *all* prayed *all* their lives that dad would be saved. Both dads were saved and both dads are in heaven today. They will enjoy heaven forever together. That is the power of gospelizing your witness in the home.

*But how? What does that mean? What should I do?*

We are jumping into 1 Peter 3 and the context is so important. 1 Peter is written to a group of Christians who felt completely alienated from the culture around them. Peter calls them exiles. Not that they are exiled geographically but their faith in Christ makes them exiled spiritually. We can relate these days, can't we? How should they live? In 2:12 he urges them to live such quality lives that the pagans around them may mock their Christian faith but have nothing bad to say about the way they live. Jesus called this in his famous Sermon on the Mount, being salt and light.

Then Peter addresses different categories: citizens submitting to governing authorities; slaves in that ancient world submitting to their masters, as Jesus even submitted to authorities over him trusting his heavenly Father. Then he addresses Christian wives married to unbelieving husbands, "*Likewise, wives, be subject to your own husbands, so that even if some do not obey the word, they may be won without a word by the conduct of their wives, when they see your respectful and pure conduct*" (1 Peter 3:1-2).

He addresses Christian wives with unbelieving husbands. The principles here apply no matter who you are in the family. He begins with the leadership structure. Wives be subject to your husband. This makes clear that God's will for the family applies even when not everyone is a Christian. A Christian child could think, I'm a Christian so therefore I don't have to honor my unbelieving parents. Or a Christian husband could think he doesn't have to love his wife like Christ loved the church if the wife isn't a Christian. No. God's will for the family transcends the individual faith status. This is also how a whole family of unbelievers can experience God's common grace and blessing in a family. So what should you do if your family member isn't a Christian?

### **Win Them Without Words so You Can Win Them With the Word**

*"...so that even if some do not obey the word, they may be won without a word by the conduct of their wives"* (1 Peter 3:1).

Win? Win to what? Win to their own personal faith in Christ. Win them to the gospel. Peter is explaining a spiritual and psychological principle. *Our walk speaks louder than our talk.* Peter is certainly not saying that talk is unnecessary. The gospel is good news and must be shared verbally and explained. He is not promoting a speechless gospel. Rather, the human mind is very keen on perceiving hypocrisy. When someone talks the talk but doesn't walk the walk, it calls into question all the talk. The vocal Christian at work who cheats his time or pilfers office supplies, his walk undermines his talk. At the same time, when someone walks their talk, it empowers their talk and makes people go *hmmm....*

Family is the ultimate up close and personal observation of talk and walk. No one knows us like our family. It's very hard to fake it. Peter urges us to see our life with our family as a powerful missional opportunity for the people we love the most. Note the two categories of life-walk he highlights: "*when they see your respectful and pure conduct.*"

<b>Respectful Conduct</b>	<b>Attitude</b>
<b>Pure Conduct</b>	<b>Actions</b>

If you want to win your family members to Christ, the daily **attitude** you display will either enhance the gospel you profess or detract from it. Peter isn't urging *fake it to make it* here. We don't put on false airs of spirituality. Rather, we live authentically in a way the unbeliever cannot do. Which attitudes unveil the gospel? The counterintuitive ones for humans. Servant-heartedness. Helpfulness. Care and concern for other's needs. What does that all sound like? Normal agape Christian love! Thankfully, these are qualities that a genuine Christian is growing in naturally as the Spirit of God creates Christlikeness. That's attitude.

The other is **conduct**. This is the moral trajectory of our lives. Never perfect but there should be a substantial difference in the moral life of a Christian and the other unbelievers in the family. This could and should be quite unnerving for them. They knew you in your party days but now...what's gotten into you? Humble obedience to just the Ten Commandments should do the trick. Just those 10 will sufficiently say, *Something is different in John's life. Hmmm....* Christian conduct will definitely cause your unsaved family go, hmmm....

You may be listening today and your family is totally Christian. You might be thinking, *I'm so glad my husband is already a Christian so I'm free to treat him badly*. And you would be wrong. Peter isn't urging an extraordinary Christianity here, he is encouraging a normal Christianity, flawed and imperfect, lived out by the gospelized family member.

If your family members are already Christians, ask yourself, *if they weren't a Christian, am I the kind of Christian husband/wife/sibling/child that would cause them to consider becoming a Christian?* This is a call no matter what your status and we should all strive to live in our families in such a way that our walk and talk shouts the gospel.

*If my spouse weren't a Christian, would my life make him or her desire to be one?  
If my brother or sister weren't a Christian, would my life make them want to be one?*

A reminder, the gospel isn't good people living perfect lives. 1 Peter doesn't say anything about being a perfect wife. In fact, it is in the moments of imperfection, disappointment, and disillusionment that Christianity shines the best because these highlight Christian love, covenant faithfulness, and forgiving grace. Conflict. Illness. Trials. Hurts. These are the moments when God's gospel shines the brightest. Gospelize them and make the most of them.

A few weeks ago, a woman in our church shared with me her story. She wrote me an email, *"My marriage had not been good for 29 years, but the last 3 years I gospelized my wifery.... It brought my husband to the Lord. He died 13 years ago. But I know that I'll see him again."*

I wrote her back and asked her a few follow up questions.

**If you could go back, what would you do different in the earlier years?** *I definitely would have prayed more. I would have been a more loving wife also. By loving, I mean kinder and gentler, more attune to his needs, and not so stubborn on my part. I think that the longer I was a Christian reading my Bible, the reality that he might spend eternity in hell was what made me get on my knees more. God changed me and I firmly believe that change in me is what brought my husband to the Lord. God is so good. He answered those many years of prayers.*

In the past I've shared this story but it fits so well. Many years ago, when I first came to Bethel, I got a call from an elderly woman; we will call her Jan. Her unsaved husband was dying in the hospital and she asked if I would go see him. I had never met him. I understood that he was a tough sort of guy with no interest in Christianity. The family was praying as they viewed this as kind of a last chance for him to believe.

I went to the hospital and came into the room. The husband was on the bed with tubes everywhere. Jan was on the other side, holding his hand and slowly rubbing it. I sat down next to him. I sensed he wasn't really too interested in me being there, but I commenced with some small talk. Very abruptly he said, "*Pastor, if you have something to say, you say it, 'cuz I got to pee.*" There was a disdain for me in his voice that honestly ticked me off. I rose from my chair and got right in his face and I said something like, "*Well then let me get right to it. You're about to die. Without Jesus, you are going to hell. You can deny the gospel all you want but you can't deny it in your wife.*"

He looked like he might take a swing at me but the moment I mentioned his wife, his whole face changed. He looked over at her. There she is rubbing his hand. He said, "*Yep, you're right. She's one fine cookie.*"

Think of Jan all those married years, taking the kids to church, reading them the Bible, with no spiritual support whatsoever from her husband. All the faithful wifely responsibilities she did for him and with him. Year after year, right up to holding his hand on his death bed. The net effect? At the end of his life, he couldn't speak evil of Christianity because of the beautiful example of it in his wife.

That's what winning unsaved family without words looks like. If you are reading this and your spouse is a Christian and you are not, you should know the deepest desire of your spouse is that you would trust in Christ as your Savior. It's what he or she thinks about when they make a wish and blow out the birthday cake candles. It's what they pray for when their head hits the pillow. It's what they are quietly praying for right now. Have they been perfect or even close? No. But the gospel isn't that God saves perfect people, it's that God will save any sinner who repents of their sin and puts their personal trust in hope for salvation from God's judgment in Jesus' death for their sins.

Might the life of your Christian family member bring you even today to a point where you would trust in Jesus as your Savior today? Right now? There's a family member whose heart is hoping you will. They love you and they want to spend eternity with you.

And that is Family Month 2021. *The Gospelized Family*. Bringing the gospel to our families and our homes.

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