
Living the Gospel at Home

The Centrality of the Gospel in the Believer's Home

Titus 2:11-14

Devon Berry

Introduction

Over the past month, I have been reminded, in painful high definition, of what sin there is often in the home, among those we call family. I want to read a few verses to you and then I thought that we would begin this evening with a poem. Not a very good one unfortunately. But one, hopefully, that will strike a chord in your own soul. *Romans 6:12 Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal bodies to make you obey their passions. Galatians 5:24 And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. Matthew 18:8 And if your hand or your foot causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to enter life crippled or lame than with two hands or two feet to be thrown into eternal flame. 1 Corinthians 9:27 I pummel my body and make it a slave. Proverbs 5:22 The iniquities of the wicked ensnare him, and he is held fast in the cords of his sin.*

*The bony, long, and thin fingers of her pale hands
are clasped around me.*

*Her razor-sharp nails dig into my flesh and each attempt to resist her grip exacts some
strange agony that makes me lie even more still than before, acquiescent.*

I hate it here.

I hate the cold clammy feel of sin's entanglement, death's breath in my face.

I loathe my sin, I loathe myself.

Yet I choose to lie in her poisonous embrace.

Her strength is an illusion, but the longer I lie here, the stronger the illusion is.

In my hand lies a dagger. It is an illusion slayer, so they say. I limply fiddle with it.

The ridiculousness of this scenario is enraging.

With every minute, hour, day, month, year that passes (how long has it been?)

*My skin takes on a hue that makes it increasingly difficult to see where her revolting appen-
dages end and myself begins. Snakes hiss from beneath her fingernails.*

*I'm getting sick in the head now. I tell myself that harming her will harm me. I can no longer
discern evil from good. I am mired in the pit.*

I hate it here.

I hate the cold clammy feel of sin's entanglement, death's breath in my face.

I loathe my sin, I loathe myself.

I am like a worm writhing in my disgust.

Yet there is a Spirit within me that refuses to let me die here in refuse, though I wish I would.

It is either me or her. Someone must go.

I take my dagger and begin thrashing at her, at myself, I don't know, it doesn't matter. I only want free.

She shrieks, I wail. There is blood. There is battle. There is viciousness.

I am thrusting with my dagger at her awful hands. My dagger is now a club and I am bludgeoning her. My club is now an axe and I am hacking away at her limbs. Finally my axe is a great sword and I am swinging it mightily.

I can't believe I've laid here this long. How much time? How much? What a gloomy, sick, and sad tragedy. How can I have done this?

I hate it here and I am now swinging with such fury that I have hewn her filthy corpse into pieces.

I hate the cold clammy feel of sin's entanglement, death's breath in my face, and I am now taking aim at her face.

I loathe my sin, I loathe myself, and I take the point of my and sword drive and it straight through the throat of her horrible, horrible head.

The illusion evaporates. I wake covered with sweat and grime. I wish it were a dream, but it was not. So much evil has come of my sin.

But for the time being I am awake. My King is before me. His Spirit still resides in me. My sword is in my hand. I am ashamed and I am humbled. But I am also awestruck. My King has kept all of his promises. This sword, it really cuts. Best of all, I am free. The enslavement, my sin, has been conquered and is therefore conquerable. All hail my King.

This poem probably sounds a little raw and aggressive for a “family conference”. I’m sharing it tonight though, because the inspiration for this poem is my own personal struggle with sin at home, with my family, in the confines of my family’s private life. Can you at all relate? It is my experience, and I think the Bible perhaps hints at it in its qualifications for leaders in the church¹, that there is no place quite like home... to expose the heart... and the depth of the blackness of sin. Oh the awfulness of my sin in my home.

And this, my dear fellow believers, is why the gospel in our homes is so very important. Sin is a ravaging, satanic, and destructive force in our families. And our King beckons we destroy it with decisive force, that is, put to death whatever is earthly in us². In this mission, the gospel is our only hope.

Is There Sin in Your Home?

As I said, there is no place quite like the home to expose the heart. Amen? Some know this. Others... well, they don't think things are really all that serious. For some, it is simply the

¹ 1 Timothy 3:1ff.

² Matthew 18: 7-9; Romans 6:12; Colossians 3:5-8

monotony and steady state of your sin that has lulled you into a secure sense of comfort. You are who you are – and whether or not that has anything to do with sin matters little at this point. You have, perhaps, “aged” into a certain “way of life” and the time for change, in your mind, is past. Or you hold yourself above God’s word – picking and choosing your brand of Christianity. For others, you are simply naïve. You do not see your sin. Your heart is not pricked when you steal glory. Perhaps it is a blinding folly, or perhaps it a simple chronological handicap – you have not yet been exposed to enough of life and enough of God’s holiness to appreciate the depth of your own depravity. Youth, many of you fall into this category. In fact, to you, the whole poem I just read may sound like some weird and personal story that probably should not have been shared from the pulpit. Maybe so. But consider the words of David, *a man after God’s own heart*:

Have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love, according to your abundant mercy blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin! For I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me. Against you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight (Psalm 51: 1-4).

Or consider Abraham, *the friend of God*, whom Abimelech rightly accuses:

“What have you done to us? And how have I sinned against you, that you have brought on me and my kingdom a great sin? You have done to me things that ought not to be done? (Genesis 20:9)

Or consider Peter, *the rock on whom the Church will be built*, and Christ’s order to him:

Get behind me, Satan! You are a hindrance to me. For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man (Matthew 16:23).

Or what about Paul, *the great apostle to the Gentiles*? He says this of himself:

For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh. For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out. For I do not do the good I want, But the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing (Romans 6:17-19).

If men as great as these, struggle in such significant ways, who are we to think that we are somehow less prone to sin than they? Sin is in our hearts, and therefore sin is in our homes. Consider these kinds of *moments*: A glare, a murmur, a sarcastic turn of phrase, a snide comment, a raised voice, a harsh and destructive word, a slammed door, a hole in the drywall, a thrown phone, a threat, a slap, a slug, a shove, a manipulation, a swearing at, an walking out on, a jeering, and oh the list could go on and on. And these are just moments, instances.

There are then the often much more subtle sin *patterns* that pervade our lives but have slipped into other explanatory categories such as personality or habit or “the way a person is.” I always take some time to sit down and watch TV when I get home, I need to unwind. She’s a teenager, what do you expect? It’s that time of the month – don’t push it. Intimacy? It’s overrated, we’ve matured beyond needing that. Sure, sometimes we go for hours, or days, or every once in a while even a whole week with the silent treatment, we both just

need some room. We've never learned to live on what we earn, we're like most Americans. I'm just not a people person. Some situations are better left alone. Well, we can't go backward now. We kind of have this pattern – we blow up, everyone gets upset, but then after a few days, everything is okay again. Of course I have to spend hours and hours on Facebook or the internet, it's my connection to people. All of these patterns, of course, come with hearts, and attitudes, and contexts, which must be explored before sin can be determined. Nevertheless, many times, comments and phrases like these are the ways we explain our sin to ourselves and others as something other than sin.

My point here is this, if a series on the home doesn't get your attention, you are probably in one way or another kidding yourself about yourself. Russ argued for the centrality of Christ in the home this morning, this evening I will discuss the centrality of Christ's message, the gospel, in the home, primarily in its practical application. And we will allow Titus 2:11-14 to shape our thoughts in this area. Let's Pray.

Titus 2:11-14

A brief introduction to the context will suffice for our purposes tonight. You may remember from a previous study of this book that Titus has been sent by Paul to the island of Crete to "put what remained into order" (1:5). Titus was working to fully establish the churches that had sprung up on the island of Crete. Titus' task involved, among other things, instructing the church in the basics of doctrine and of Christian living. I want to make two brief observations on the context and then we will move into discussing 2:11-14.

First, note that Titus' teaching in chapters 2-3, focuses namely on two major issues: households (2:1-10) and the gospel (2:11-3:11). These areas of focus are put forward as the biblical alternative to false teachers and false doctrine (2:1). In the face of false teaching, Paul emphasized the importance of godly living in households and basic doctrine concerning the gospel. (2:1, 3:8-11). Perhaps we can observe here that at times, the best protection against error is not top-shelf polemics, but bottom-shelf rudiments, that is, the fundamentals. As Alistair Begg often says, making the plain things the main things.

Second, pay attention to the "thats" in 2:1-10 where Paul is mainly giving instructions for Christian households in the church. Here is the summary. Godly living in Christian community produces three effects: First, (v.5) it decreases the likelihood of the word of God being reviled; second, (v.8) it makes empty and infrequent the accusations of opponents against believers, putting them to shame; and third, (v.10) it adorns the doctrine of God our Savior. Do you note the strong outward orientation of the effects of godly households? It stays the mouths of those who oppose, and upholds and beautifies God's words. Here is another way to say the same thing for those of you who like longer words: Godly living in Christian community is a theological aesthetic that produces an evangelistic apologetic. I think the another way of saying this that may be, unfortunately, much easier to appreciate, is that when persons who use the title "Christian" to describe their households live no differently than the world, they beautifully showcase our opponents' accusations and destructively vandalize our Lord's testimony. Case in point: Mark Sanford, the South Carolinian Governor.

When we begin to understand our households as beachheads for a gospel testimony to the world, we are taken way beyond, “Can we all just get along?” as a goal for our home. Conquering sin, and growing in godliness in our homes, is about more than simply our homes. It is about adorning the very word of God for a watching world. And “the basics” are where we must start.

Paul begins us on our journey through verses 11-14 with the word “For...” The instructions of vv. 1-10 are moved from the realm of impossibility to the realm of possibility by what follows. Let’s read these verses together (read vv. 11-14).

The Gospel Saves (v. 11)

(Read v.11) What brings salvation? It is the grace of God, as made possible through Christ’s substitutionary death (3:4-7). Nothing else. This leads us to our first observation and application: Only the gospel saves.

Let me ask you a few questions: In what area, if your child were to utterly fail, would you be most disappointed. In what area, if your spouse were to accomplish unparalleled success, would you be most pleased? What, if you yourself could have it, would make everything alright? For what would you give *everything* to ensure that it happens for your children? To where are you running around to drop your children off from dawn to dusk? To what or whom are you writing your checks to get the best of? What activities do you consciously and intentionally engage in when you know you should be doing something else? The answers you give to these questions are, potentially, the “other gospels” creeping around in your home competing with the “grace of God” as saviors.

Here are some potential answers to the those questions: Education. Job success. Moral behavior. Health, vitality, and attractiveness. Peace and stability. Financial soundness. Material possession. Environment. Vacation. Family harmony. Social acceptance. Any number of Christian practices. In our families, no one, of course, ever openly identifies these as being competing gospels – but we function as if they are. We trust in them, we look to them for a sense of well-being and safety. They are our measure of success. In your home, just as on the island of Crete (cf. 1:10-16), there are many gospels competing with the true gospel.

What is the solution here? To eliminate all desire and all dedication to anything but the gospel? No. The gospel itself is far too expansive to be quarantined by that kind of reductionist spirit. The solution is to prize the true gospel over and above all competing gospels. The problem is not that you or your child loves piano or lacrosse and work hard to succeed at it. The problem is not that you want to move to the next rung in the career ladder at your job. The problem is not that you value education and seek out the best outlets you can find. The problem is that these things eclipse the one true gospel in your family’s life. Life revolves around sports or career, as if they could save. A “B” in a class, or a lost match, or a difficult recital, or an unharmonious holiday family event, or less than attractive appearance creates more consternation in our hearts, than the gospel ever has. This is how we make little of the gospel in our home and much of

worldly things. This is how we, in our practical living, demonstrate that we functionally believe other gospels save. (example with neighbor).

The Gospel Trains (v. 12)

If in our families we can begin to prize the gospel as the that which truly deals with our greatest problem, which completely changes everything, if we can prize it as our salvation, then we can begin to move toward understanding it as the power for our transformation.

[Read v.12] Note that just as in v.11, the grace of God is the object. It is the grace of God that trains us to renounce and trains us to live. As in all Scripture, Paul has chosen his words carefully here. He addresses these things not because they sounded nice in the Greek, but because they are real areas in which believers stumble and in which believers must grow. So here is the application question in your home: Assuming that you have made it clear in your home that the gospel is our sole hope for salvation and godward change, the only thing that brings any true meaning to life, have you established patterns of speaking about the activity of the gospel according to the Bible's description? In other words, do you as a family discuss attitudes, behaviors, beliefs and desires in Bible ways? With Bible language? Do you call living without any thought of God³, ungodliness? Do you describe unbridled wants for all this life has to offer as worldly passions?

Are we looking to the gospel to do what God says it will do – or are we looking to it for something else? Fire insurance, club membership, inner-peace, family acceptance, pleasing of spouse or parents, political affiliation, support of our legalism? Verse 11 tells us the gospel saves. Verse 12 tells us that it does not end there. The gospel then goes on to transform through training. Quite often, however, are expectations are out of line with what God has told us her. This is a lot like the experience health care providers often have when interacting with patients. Someone 150 lbs. overweight comes to the doctor complaining of knee pain, back pain, and shortness of breath with exertion. The doctor, among other things, tells them they need to change their lifestyle – in short, eat less and exercise more. The patient leaves the office upset and offended... what did they expect? A pat on the back and a cookie? Beloved, the gospel has come to train you, to change you, to recreate you, to renew you, to give you a new heart... We do not train to remain the same. As a college professor, I often see this a similar utter confusion in freshmen. They thought they signed up for a very expensive high school... and life would continue as it was.

Any Biggest Loser fans here? How about that Bob and Jillian? They are trainers who are able to motivate their clients to remarkable change. Like our faith, the contestants' change comes through significant trial and suffering⁴. But very much unlike our faith,

³ See Jerry Bridges *Respectable Sins*, p. 53

⁴ James 1:2-4, 1 Peter 1:3-7

Bob and Jillian are pointing people inward for strength and resolve, to family and friend for inspiration and motive. The apostle Paul points us outward, to the grace of God.

The gospel brings with it an agenda and a language for change. In the home we must openly embrace both using distinctively Bible language. Do you converse about your “hearts” at home? Have you helped your teenager see their inability to focus as a potentially severe distraction by worldly passions, requiring self-control and a mind that is more oriented to the things of God (godliness) than to the things of the world? Have you discussed with your spouse your desire to abandon uprightness when it comes to disciplining your children – your real struggle with wanting to seek revenge upon them. It is only when we use Bible language to describe our sin and difficulty that we can be pointed to Bible solutions.

Just a last brief comment before we move on from here. How does this “grace of God” do this? Is it mystical? I think a better word is supernatural. But the supernatural has clear evidences in the natural. This is what Philippians 2:12-13 and Hebrews 4:11-16 teaches us. For the sake of time, I summarize it this way: We will know (experientially know) grace for obedience, when we obey. And oh what a pleasant place this is. Say these things in your home. Fight sin by the grace of God in your home. The family that fights together stays together.

The Gospel Orients (v. 13)

We are being trained, v.12 tells us, in this “present age.” What does this suggest other than we live in view of a *future* age. We train with a vision in mind. We are people who are oriented by our waiting. And what are we waiting for? (read v.13) It is our blessed hope, the glory of our God and Savior, Jesus Christ. You see, what you wait for shapes you. Easy illustration? You live in a home with one bathroom. Your sister is in it. Your bladder is stretched so taut, that one wrong move and it will explode. Is what you are waiting for shaping your behavior? You bet! You are waiting for retirement. Does it shape your behavior? Absolutely. You are waiting for the 9 months to be completed and for your child to arrive. Do you have a list that you are checking things off of that must be done. Are things different around your home?

We are between the two “appearances” of verse 11 and verse 13. The in-between period is full of the grace of God training and shaping us. We continually live in a historical and spiritual context and that which we know to be our past and we believe to be our future, has a tremendously powerful influence over our present. And this is where your understanding of redemptive history becomes so tied up in your personal history... isn't this so much of what Paul is saying here? But we as Christians often function like amnesiacs and anxiety-ridden future-phobes. Paralyzed in the present by a sense of free-fall or completely ensnared by a worldly passion unchecked by a clear sense of who we are.

What are the anchor events that give meaning to the activity in your home? Marriage, children, retirement? Driver's license, graduation, and college? Making the team and the game on Friday night? Summer break, vacation, and fall back to school? You see, we are all “anchored” by this sense of past and future – defining who we are, where we

are going, and what will happen on the way. If we do not intentionally define our history and our future in our families, somebody or something else will. How often does this question get asked in your home: What's happening today? Beneath every answer to that question, and sometimes smack on top of the answer to that question, needs to be the truest answer – today, we are taking one more step forward in our growth by the grace of God toward the glory of his future appearance.

How is this sense of place and identity established in a family? It is not so different than what you have always been doing to establish the “sense” of who you are as a family (Berrys, Boohers, Fryes, Rechs, etc.) For most, this has happened quite naturally. Stories are told, photographs are taken, family events are attended, memories are made, moments are interpreted. It is intentional and unintentional, spontaneous and planned, formal and informal. The difference is as *you* become ever more aware of your link with the family of God, it begins to seep in and change your understanding of all that your last name has come to mean. *You* begin linking your family to the redemptive context in which they exist. In other words, it is more a matter of linking yourself to this context. The rest is byproduct. Reuben will know that his name has a special meaning that points to God. He'll know because he'll hear the story 1000 times. Henry Cooper understands that he has a heart because his parents have pointed it out to him on numerous occasions, in both happy times and not-so-happy times. Many of us in this church understand that an idol is something we want so bad that we are willing to sin to get it or willing to sin if we don't get it, because Greg Cook has said it to us scores of times from this pulpit. The meaning of life is built this way... through moment stacked upon instance stacked upon event stacked upon patterns and habits... With the Word in hand we teach each other who we are. God's people living somewhere between grace and glory.

The Gospel Assures & Activates Us (v.14)

Verse 14 brings us to the centrality of Christ's work in the gospel and therefore in our homes. Why do we wait for the appearing of Christ? And why is he our blessed hope? And why is he great and glorious? And how has he become our savior? (Read v. 14). There is such great hope for the believer in this verse. Christ has redeemed us. We have moved from the domain of darkness to the domain of light. The penalty for our sin has been dealt to Christ, and the blessing of sonship has been given to us. He has rescued us. It is his work and his activity that moves us out of lawlessness and purifies us. He is why poems written by believers can end in rejoicing. We can rest in his work... but we cannot rest in our work. Paradoxically, resting in his work produces activity in us. However, we are not working to redeem or purify ourselves. We are free of those concerns. Rather we are free to exercise faith working through love (Galatians 5:6), that is, to be zealous for good works. In our assurance of Christ's work, we are activated. When the truth of the gospel sinks into our hearts and we begin to grow in maturity, one of the clear hallmarks of being one of Christ's people, is this “vehement contention” for good work. This is to say, we become immersed in the concerns and the activities of the kingdom. Consider a family that was growing in its understanding not of “how to be American” or “how to obtain the very best life possible” but rather how embrace the

gospel in such a manner that it that produces vehement contention for the work of the kingdom.

Conclusion

I want to wrap tonight up with a few final observations. First, I want to say again that we must look to our households ever so carefully. Patterns of gross sin can so easily become denizens in the home, well disguised in the garb of everyday life. Second, know by winsomely and wisely centralizing the gospel in your home, you put in place what is needed to deal with sin. Thirdly, centralizing the gospel in your home will require you to centralize the gospel in your heart. Dwell long and hard on the profound truth so compactly expressed in vv. 11-14. Pray that God would give you great affections for these things. Fourthly, I know that many of you live in homes where both believers and unbelievers are residing. Please do not think that this requires some type of split personality to manage. The same gospel that saves the lost, also transforms the saved. Your duty is to live in a way that openly demonstrates all that the gospel is. Fifth, do not underestimate the potential of your home to function as a clear argument for the truth of the gospel and for the beauty of gospel-giver. Our homes, because of the unique microcosm of relationships and responsibilities that take place within them, have a distinct ability to be conveyors of grace and glory. Sixthly, don't underestimate the rigorousness and apparent riskiness of being trained by the grace of God. Renouncing ungodliness and worldly passions and learning to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives will requires much more courage, strength, and humility than anything else you will do in life (share personal example). Seventh and lastly, as Paul commands Titus in v.15, "Declare these things." In your homes you must transparently live and intentionally speak of the gospel and its many implications for your life. No matter how young or old in the faith, we do not outgrow our need to give and receive gospel ministry. I firmly believe that the family is *the* strongest earthly influence for creating meaning in the minds of humans. Your home is where this is currently happening. Are the interpretations of life that you are offering, both spoken and unspoken, creating a world of meaning that reflects the truths of the gospel? Let's pray.