

Want More Righteousness? Stop Fighting

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Would you kindly open your Bible to James 1, James 1? And as you do, permit me to offer a number of disclaimers this morning. First of all, I'm very glad to see Charles, but a little bitter to see Charles. He was supposed to be in the pulpit. But he's back with us healthy today, so I'm kind of glad to see ya, Charles. Ty called me and said, "Could you," and I said, "Would you be amenable to a sermon perhaps that has more application, the acts of Jesus," and his comment was, "Well, that's okay. It'll balance me out because I don't do enough application." I disagree with him, but nevertheless. I informed him that basically he will not need to preach application for at least six months because we're going to be diving into a prepositional phrase. That's all we're going to do, one prepositional phrase is going to be our goal today, and as you listen to this, you are going to hear a tremendous amount of law. The Reformers used to have their eye on the law and gospel distinction quite fervently to find balance in everything: how we evangelize law then gospel; the hymns that we sing, do they have a balance of law and gospel; the overarching narrative of the sermon, is it law and or not just the sermon, but the worship services is it law and gospel? And the same thing is true for a sermon. It must contain law, and it must contain gospel, because if we simply preach law, you will be like a speed bag and you will be defeated and you will be pummeled, but if we only preach gospel, then there will be a tendency for licentiousness. After all, God doesn't seem to care too much about sin. Charles Wesley, John Wesley said that a sermon should be 90% law and 10% gospel. John Wesley will be pleased with this sermon, not so much with his denomination, but with his sermon.

So let's dive into our text and as we do in James 1, my question for you this morning is this" would you like more righteousness? Now to be clear, because of Jesus Christ, his righteousness is imputed to us, we have all the righteousness that we need to be acceptable to God that was given to us by Jesus. So more specifically, would you like to produce more righteousness? And the reason that we are going to dive into really just a prepositional phrase is because I went through probably a dozen commentaries looking for an explanation to the phrase that we're diving into, and I couldn't find really anything. And so this morning, that's where we're going to do our deep dive because our text tells us, if you'd like to produce more righteousness, stop fighting. That's what our text is about, and I would challenge you based on Ty's sermon from last week, if you recall, it was Romans 12, how there is supposed to be unity in the body, and I I decided to take a look at the text when he was done, you know, just to make sure he handled it correctly, I wanted to dive in deeper to understand it, and I kept reading through Romans 12 and I

noticed, "Wait a second, Paul, is persistent with a theme of unity. that we treat each other with gentleness, that we esteem others more highly than ourselves," and it runs all the way from Romans 12 to 15, and if you would scan through the epistles, you will regularly hear the drumbeat of unity, love for one another, fellowship, which the devil hates, God loves. Ty, last week, talked about the fellowship and the unity and the lack of fighting and jealousy that we should have in the church, our text is going to take us into our homes where perhaps you could use a word from the Lord to curb some of the anger, to perhaps dissipate some of the tension that exists, and to mortify being unrighteously angry, not sinning, and producing righteousness.

Please remember every emotion there is a negative and a positive. I can be jealous sinfully or non-sinfully. God is jealous of his people. God is jealous for our affections. He's not sinning. Now if I'm jealous because I can't believe you got that and I don't, well, then I've got a sinful type of jealousy, and you can do that with every emotion, including anger. Anger can indeed be righteous, it can be good. Ephesians 4, Paul talks about sin, you're going to sin is the assumption, rather you're going to be angry, that's going to happen but don't sin when you do because there is a type of sinful anger that is very horizontal. "I have been slighted. I have been hurt. I have been wounded and I am going to murder you." On the other hand, there is a righteous anger when we see sin, when we see depravity, when we see school shootings, when we see children abused, when we see the effects of sin, it is right to be righteously angry. But of course, the challenge for us is finding that line and staying on the right side, isn't it? Because I don't know about you, but I'm much more prone to a sinful anger than a righteous anger, and I hope our text will help us with that this morning.

James 1:19. "This you know, my beloved brethren, everyone must be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger." Here it comes. This is our phrase, "for the anger of man does not achieve the righteousness of God." What in the world does that mean? I mean down deep, I mean rubber on the road? Well, we can noodle it out because James doesn't leave us dangling. What do you mean, the anger of man, it doesn't produce the righteousness of God? We might gloss over it, but as James is want to do, he tends to toss out a theme and then revisit it later, and revisit it again, and that's precisely what he does with our subject. If I asked you the question, how is it that the anger of man doesn't produce the righteousness of God? What would that look like? How do we produce righteousness by not being angry, because that is the converse, isn't it? If our text says "for the anger of man does not achieve the righteousness of God," wouldn't the converse be true, "for the peace of man achieves the righteousness of God?"

Well, that's fascinating, isn't it? We've got a little bit of a hint right from our text, but if you would scoot over to James 3, James 3, he starts to color this picture for us a bit more so that we can understand how we can achieve the righteousness of God, and as we read this, it's a heavy word for us. It's a scolding word, a condemning word for us. In other words, we got some law going on here. James 3:13. "Who among you is wise and understanding? Let him show by his good behavior his deeds in the gentleness of wisdom. But if you have bitter jealousy, selfish ambition in your heart, do not be arrogant and so lie against the truth. This wisdom is not that which comes down from above," but

a sinful anger, the anger of man, "is earthly, natural, demonic. For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there is disorder, and every evil thing." Did you catch the picture that he's painting? If you have bitter jealousy, anger, you belittle, you condescend to people, what James is telling us that's earthly. That's demonic. That's sinful. That's our sinful type of anger. But then he does a contrast for us in verse 17 of chapter 3. "But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceloving, gentle, reasonable, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial, free of hypocrisy." Now check out verse 18. "And the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace." There it is. He just wrapped this up for us and he's explaining a little bit further. The anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God, but the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace." When we are striving for peace in our churches, in our neighborhood, and this morning for our purposes, in our homes, we're going to see righteousness in our own lives, we're going to be producing more righteous, charitable, kindly acts than before. The contrast is clear, peace/heavenly, fighting/earthly. Peace/wise, fighting/demonic. Peace bear sweet fruit, fighting bears bitter fruit. If we can grasp how to go about the business of desiring to produce righteousness, we will produce peace, and as we're producing peace, we're going to be growing in righteousness and that's what you're going to see today. If you practice what James preaching, you are going to grow in righteousness and I hope this morning you'll see how.

Now let's continue. James 4. James is continuing a theme about fighting with one of the most, you talk about a practical question for those people who say, "Well, the Bible is an antique waited book, it doesn't deal with our contemporary issues," Here's the question, "What is the source of quarrels and conflicts among you?" Who doesn't need that question resolved and James does it for us. And if you recall from Ty's preaching on the book of James, which frankly was brilliant, he did a deep dive into this text, specifically what James, the language that he uses, very bellicose. What is the source of quarrels and conflicts? Really, it's fights, wars, brawlings. Why do you do this so much? Well, James is going to explain it to us.

"Is not the source your pleasures that wage war in your members? You lust and do not have; so you commit murder. You are envious and cannot obtain; so you fight and quarrel." You go to war. Paul Tripp called this the descent into sin. It starts out with having a desire that is perfectly good. Is it right to desire a spouse that makes you happy? Yes, that's fine. Is it a fine desire to hope that your children would always be obedient? Yes, that is fine. But here's the problem, as soon as that desire becomes a need, we begin the descent into sin. When I need my wife to make me happy, when I need my children to obey, you're setting yourself up for anger and you're setting yourself up for fighting because what you are doing is you're turning a perfectly fine desire into something that is taking the place of something else and you will go to war to serve that desire.

So it starts out with desire, moves into a need. It becomes an expectation. "Do you know how much I bring home? Do you know how much I do around here? I expect, wife, make me happy. Kids, be obedient." What's going to inevitably follow that expectation? Frustration because it's not going to happen. Your spouse isn't always going to make you

happy. Your children, this might come as a shock, they don't always obey. So what then follows? Frustration and then finally punishment.

You go to war, you brawl, you kill because we're not getting our way. It seems that when we are agitated sinfully, we are suffering from theological amnesia. We are throwing out everything that we know and understand about God, what he has done for us in Christ and what is my reasonable response to him. Doesn't it seem that way when you get angry, do you think clearly? That's why we tell our kids if they're getting huffy and puffy, "Just slow down. Breathe a little bit. Calm down." Because our brains just tend to focus on one thing, and James tells us what it is, it's what you want. You want what you want, and you're going to kill if you don't get it. There's something rotten going on in our hearts and we're going to explore now what it is that we are forgetting when we are unrighteously angry and we go to war and fight. I'm not going to tell you how many points I have because for you love bean-counting sermon point people, yeah, 3. Oh, if it were only three. And I'm not gonna tell you because I know some of you, "All right, he's only on number 3. When's this plane gonna land?" We'll land the plane. So I won't tell you and we'll make pace.

What are we forgetting when we fight? Now, please remember what my disclaimer was in the beginning, that this is a lot of law coming at you. Okay, this is going to be a lot of law and I believe you're going to see in yourself perhaps more sin than before you arrived this morning. We're not going to leave you there, but we are going to dwell there and camp for a bit because the word forgetting, what you're forgetting when you're fighting, it's another way of saying here's what you're doing and you need to stop doing that. So this is law.

What are we forgetting? First, I'm forgetting to esteem others as better than myself. In other words, I put my pleasures before yours. Why? Because we are pride monsters, aren't we? I can't speak for you, but I love me some me. I love my thoughts. I love what I prefer. I love what I say. I love my decisions. I love me. Here's the problem: so does your spouse. You love you and he or she loves him or herself and now you have got two self-styled wills colliding up against one another in a home. We're not even going to talk about the kids today, that's another level that gets tossed into this place that Martin Luther calls a school of character. When we are fighting, we are esteeming ourselves as better than somebody else.

Perhaps this illustration will make that plain. I don't know about you, but I love the Master's golf tournament. It is for some reason, it is must-watch TV for me. Did you hear that word, must-watch TV for me? Already this pot is cooking very poorly. And so I get set up, I've got the thing timed, I'm down in the basement where it's cooler. I've got my frou frou drink from Costco, and on comes that music and the voice of Jim Nantz and all is well in my world until suddenly I hear a cacophony from above. "Shut up, you loser! Knock it off! Mom!" Why can't I just have some peace and quiet here? Why do they have to disturb me? What is going on in my heart in that moment? I'm esteeming myself as better than everybody else. How dare they take away from the pleasure of the king? And

that's what happens in my heart when I forget that I'm a sinner. When I fight, I'm being pride-filled.

Now, if you're not persuaded that that happens to apply to you, I have for you this morning, and I'll tell you the number, a number of ways that you can know you have pride, 50 of them. I'm not sure we'll get through all of them. Let's see how much we can all endure. Remember, this is more law coming at you. This is just more law. This is our wicked heart. Maybe you'll see some recesses that you weren't aware of.

You want to be well-known. You want to be important. You want to be an influencer.

2. You're sinfully competitive, you've got to win because nobody can beat you, right? You seek to impress people, and this can be a variety of subjects: my education, my income level, I buy this car so that you can know I've made it. All of these things that we like to put out there for people to see so that they esteem us as highly as we esteem ourselves, how spiritual you are, what you look like, what you've accomplished, what you know, where you went to school, who you know, what your background is, what your parents did. You lay it out there so that people will esteem you highly because you already do.

5. You like to talk about yourself, rather speak than listen.

6. If you're ever deceitful in an effort to try to not look bad in front of somebody, perhaps just leave out some details, water things down just a bit. What is being produced out of a heart of pride? All sorts of sin

7. A sign of pride is desiring recognition and praise.

8. Not feeling very fulfilled when we serve others because we sort of think they should really be serving us. Isn't it true, we become self sufficient? You don't need anybody else. If you have pride, you're self-focused.

12. You fear, man. I can't let anybody know about this, because they will have a lowly opinion of me and you can't abide it. It's a heart filled with pride. If you're insecure, I don't want to try anything new because I might fail and people might think I'm a loser. Do you see how deeply rooted pride is?

14. You compare yourself to others and I always end up looking better, frankly. If you're a perfectionist. If you are somebody you just can't abide by something being off just a little bit, you are wanting people to think well of you because that mess would reflect poorly on me.

16. Self-serving. When asked to do something, I find myself wondering how will doing this help me? Will I be inconvenienced? I'm not focused on the needs of others, the interests of others. I'm focusing on me. If you think highly of yourself, if you give credit to yourself for success. If you're just being flat out self-righteous, if you feel deserving, if

you're ungrateful, if you're captive to self-pity. Why is self-pity pride? Because it looks like just the opposite. The world would say, "Well, you need to love yourself more." The Bible says that's not what's going on in our heart. When I'm having self-pity, it's because I actually feel like this should not be my lot. I should have a better status in life, not where I am. If we're jealous and envious, unkind and harsh. Gotta speak your mind. Know everything, got an answer for every problem. I put an asterisk next to that one because that actually describes me, and it's not an easy burden to bear, always knowing the answer to everything. It's pride. It's pride. You enter into a situation, "I've got the solution to this problem." Why? Because it's my thought and I'm a pride monster. Hard to admit we don't know. We don't listen to ordinary people. We interrupt people. You can't wait for them to stop talking so you can just jump in with the next thing. You don't get much out of teaching. You tend to evaluate the speaker rather than your own life, or you're perhaps thinking, "You know who really needed to hear this one this morning?" Thinking of others during teaching, not teachable. Don't admit wrongdoing. Being defensive, having little esteem or respect for others. We demean or belittle. We're critical. We're self-willed and stubborn. We're independent. We're unaccountable, unsubmitive never delegate because nobody can do it as well as I can. A lack of compassion. Never asking for forgiveness and not having close relationships because they're just not worth it.

That list was from Brent Detwiler, and it is a beating, is it not? And that is the state of our hearts. And that is why we go to war. "I deserve this. This is owed to me. This is only right." And when some bad happens, it is unforgivable because how dare somebody sin against me? Pride puts me first. It puts you second. And I esteem myself as better than you, and I can demonstrate this with an illustration. I want you to track what's happening in this picture that I'm going to paint for you. I want you to imagine that somebody amazing comes to your house. I mean, somebody that you just really, "Oh, I love that." It's a preacher, right, so everybody is thinking John MacArthur. So John MacArthur is coming to your house and he's going to spend the night. "Oh, how cool is that?" So what do you do? You spend the day before or maybe even the week, getting everything ready. "I wonder if he likes the orange juice with pulp or without pulp. I'd better get both just in case." You're preparing feverishly because John MacArthur is coming to your house. Lo and behold, he makes his way to the breakfast table and you, perhaps nervously, approach the table with your pulped and non-pulped orange juice to offer the preference to Dr. McArthur. And you pour the juice. I think he likes a lot of pulp. I'm not certain, but I think he likes a lot of pulp. And then you walk around the table to serve your family and you trip over the foot of your teenager. How are you going to respond to that? With fear and trembling, we serve John MacArthur, but our kid does something that just, "How could you do that?" What's going on? I'm esteeming John MacArthur as better, certainly than my child, and certainly better than myself. I'm deferential to John. I'm honoring John. He's a big deal. My kid, "Just come on, size 13, move them out of the way, would you?"

The self-righteous tend to get angry, trigger-hair angry, or is it hair-trigger? The self-righteous, get angry when their spouse sins, they feel justified in returning a sin for a sin. We believe we should never be inconvenienced or treated poorly. We believe every right is ours to brutalize somebody who shares our last name. It is amazing, isn't it? We can be

so polite with one another at church, and yet sometimes when we go home, the people that we love the most dearly we sin against. It's pride. And when I fight, I'm forgetting how much of it I possess.

2. When you fight, you're forgetting the first message of the gospel. There are two messages to the gospel. If you would like to boil down the Christian faith to two simple messages, here it is: you and I are big, bad, terrible, horrible, awful, wicked sinners. That's message number 1. Message number 2, of course, is Jesus Christ saves big, bad, wicked, awful sinners. That's it. Now, if I forget the first message, lookout, I am headed to my perch of superiority. I am gonna look down to you. I am going to bark. I am going to command and I will pour out my wrath on you as I sit above you in judgment, because I have forgotten how bad I am, and really, this is it's such insanity, isn't it? When we moved to the South, I'll never forget seeing turkey vultures for the first time. I was, I mean, I didn't know a bird could be so ugly, so hideous. I just thought that has got to be the ugliest bird on the planet. And okay, so I was day dreaming a little bit and I imagined one turkey vulture fighting with another turkey vulture. "I'm more beautiful than you are." "No, I'm more beautiful than you." It's ridiculous. They're both ugly and yet you and I can have a tendency to say that we're beautiful eagles when in reality we're turkey vultures. We're that sinful.

It's so important to remember the first message of the gospel. This will really change your home. If you would like to have one fight, okay, here we go, This is Rick Thomas. This is permission to fight about one thing. Here it is. Every day go to the mattresses over who is the chief of sinners in your home. You have that fight and the rest of them go flying right out the window. Why? Because you're remembering the first message of the gospel. Here's how you could do that and apply that and perhaps then start being more peaceable, which is a production of more righteousness in our lives. Do sin math. I can't recall if I stole this from Rick Thomas; this is an amalgamation of the Tripp brothers and Lou P. and Rick Thomas. I don't know if he coined the term sin math. Start doing sin math. Rather than looking at the sins of your spouse and your children, take a little turn and take a look at yourself, but instead of making it horizontal, make it vertical. So your spouse sins against you. Ouch, that hurts. Stop and do some sin math. Have I ever done that? More specifically, have I ever done that to my Savior? And all of a sudden, I'm gonna have a pretty difficult time going, "Okay, my spouse sinned against me, but, boing, I have committed that sin so many times against my Sovereign." Your spouse doesn't call you as often as you'd like. Question: how's your prayer life? Do you pray without ceasing? Do you check in with God on time everyday? Sin math. Your spouse harbors a grudge. How many days or potentially years have you spent disappointed, frustrated, unsatisfied with your lot in life? Yikes. okay, so my my honey did that to me, I've done that perpetually to the Lord. How can I get mad at her for something that is such a trifle compared to what I have done to my Savior? Your spouse doesn't say nice things about you. How's your worship life? Your spouse withholds affection. How often do we show our affection to God that we love him? Your spouse questions your motives. Ever done that with God? Your spouse doesn't help around the house. How much are we helping around his house? Your spouse never says thank you. There are a million blessings that

God has provided for each of us this morning, and I don't know about you, but I did not thank him for each and every one. Wait a second.

So my my wife, my kid, I do something that I think is phenomenal and special and I get nothing back from them. What God does for me by allowing me to breathe and I'm gonna get mad at them for a lack of gratitude? Your spouse tells you you don't run your house well. Well, have you ever complained about world events? How God is running the planet? Your spouse spends too much money, especially on frivolous things. Have you given everything that you could to God? Your spouse says something awful about your family. Have you ever gossiped about somebody in God's family? We've got to remember that we're the chief of sinners otherwise, we're going to be pride monsters who go to war. Are you feeling the law? But are you also starting to sense, okay, wait a second, if I start getting a better perspective these things, I am going to actually not only be producing peace, I'm going to be producing righteousness in my house because what will an understanding of knowing that you're the chief of sinners, what will that produce? Humility. That brings us to point number 3. Third, you're forgetting the second message of the gospel. You're forgetting that you are a forgiven sinner. It's the first message of the gospel. Nobody's done anything worse to you than what you have done to your Savior. You crucified the Son of God. Hear the nails rattling in your pockets. We're forgiven and if I don't remember that message of the gospel, I am simply going to be looking at how bad I am, no hope for me, no hope for my family, there's going to be no effort that I put into this.

So what does this look like? How does remembering the second message of the gospel play itself out. I know I took this from Rick Thomas because it pierced my heart years ago the first time I heard this. I've embellished it a bit but he won't mind. Let's just say your spouse sins against you and they sinned against you, there's no questioning it, they said something nasty, they lied, they perhaps gossiped about you. It was a sin. Here is my question: how do you respond in that moment? I've identified at least four different groups of people in how we respond when somebody sins against us. See if you find yourself in any of these four.

Your spouse hits you with a sin and what do you do? You hit back. You're happy to put the gloves on or take them off and go. You punch me, I'm going to punch you twice as hard. That's how we can respond, some of us do that. Second type of person Rolodex's it. Okay, fine. I'll remember this. And it could be months, it could be years later but you go to that card and you pull it out at just the right moment and go, "Yeah, like I'm lazy around the house, huh?" We store it and we remember it so we can bring it out at an opportune time. Does that describe you? Here's another category of person. You chill them out. Oh, I remember this well. Silence can be spoken. You're in the house but you're not there. "Are you doing okay?" "I'm okay. I'm fine, just fine. Have a good day to you too." We just chill them out. There's no warmth and affection. Or we run, we have propensity to just want to get out. You go clean the garage. You go play golf. You just get out.

Now let's frame this theologically. If any of those hits a nerve, let's define what it is that you are doing biblically. Your spouse sins against you and you are doing what biblically? You are punishing your spouse for his or her sins. That's what you're doing. When you strike back, no matter how it manifests itself, you are punishing your spouse for his or her sins. Question: who is punished for your spouse's sins? Oh, Jesus was. That's right. When we think that we need a pound of flesh, we're basically telling God, "I know You bruised Your only beloved Son on the behalf of my spouse, but I need me mine. I've got to have some of this." And we go to war and we murder and we make a dog's breakfast out of the gospel. That isn't gospel. If I could digress into children, don't ever punish your kids again. You can disciple them, you can discipline them, you can use the rod, but it should be to that purpose. It shouldn't be to punish them for what they've done wrong. Instead of punishing our kid for what they did wrong, we need to take our child and our spouse and point them to the one who did suffer for us and took the punishment of God on our behalf. That's being gospel-centered. That's altering the way that you are looking at everything in your house.

Here's another message of the gospel that has direct application. In Christ we have zero needs. Remember James 4? You've got a desire, that's fine, but then you need it. Guess what? In Christ we don't need anything. But when I forget the gospel, I think you need to satisfy my need, you need to fulfill me, you need to deliver. But instead I should be looking at my needs and say, "I've got none because I've got Jesus Christ, and I am not going to go to war to you because my needs have not been met because they have. I don't have any needs."

Fourth thing you're forgetting when we got to war and when we're angry, and by the way, when you're remembering you're a big, bad, terrible sinner, that you're a pride monster that Jesus died for and it causes you to not go to war, look at what's being produced in your heart, and this isn't behavioral modification, this is actually heart transformation that is taking place. That's because the anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God but when we are peace-seekers, it is going to produce righteousness in us.

The number 4 thing you're forgetting when you fight: God's creative variety. Just read this, I believe, in a Ted Tripp book on marriage, that we can get so agitated with one another, can't we, in the house over such nonsense and go to war over silly things. You like the temperature to be 71, your spouse wants it to be at 73, whichever way it goes in your house. Okay, what's going on here? What am I going to do with this conflict that is presented to us? I'm going to stop and go, wait a second, Psalm 139, not only did God knit me together but he also knit my spouse together. My God made my spouse that way. She wants it 71, I want it 73. Have you see the electricity bills? You, in the kitchen, you like to do the dishes while you're preparing the meal. Your spouse says, no, let's get everything done and then we'll deal with the dishes. Bang. Bang. Bang. Stop. My spouse was knit together by my God a little bit differently. When I fail to remember that, I'm inclined to go to war but when I think well of my spouse, when I think about God's creative hand, look at the righteousness that is being produced.

Fifth, you're forgetting your spouse's family of origins. Wayne Mack wrote a helpful book on in-laws. If you're not married, tune in now because this will help you. It will. Before you get married, have conversations about family of origin. That's what Wayne was encouraging so that you understand where they're coming from. So listen to the different backgrounds that we all bring to the marital party. Blue collar or white collar. You think that's going to make a difference? You struggled like crazy, you didn't get good Christmas gifts, you had to work for everything that was handed to you. On the other hand, what a blessing for this person and they were given much. You don't think that's going to affect the way that you interact with one another? I'm forgetting, oh, yeah, there are influences on my spouse, things that formed and shaped, and oh, yeah, I must have them too. The quality of their parents' marriage; house rules, where there a lot or a few; the personality of mom and dad, how mom and dad played their roles; family beliefs; views about intimacy; was it a peaceful home, a contentious home; style of home and furnishings; how they folded towels.

You say, wait, was tracking with you until the how they fold towels. Let's see if it might become a little bit more clear as to why I put this here. When we first got married, I hate to call out my wife like this, but she folded the bath towels wrong. Just wait, it gets so tragic, it's really just so sad. And I would watch this and it would, believe it or not, it would get me annoyed and I had to stop and go, wait a second, why am I getting so agitated? And then I realized, oh, yeah, she doesn't fold the towels the way my mom folded the towels. So not only am I a jerk but I'm a jerk with mommy issues. I am pathetic. So do you want to know what I did? This is before we were saved. I didn't want to, like, come out and say you're folding the towels wrong so I would just grab a towel and show her how it was done folding it up perfectly the way that it should be, because that's the way my mom did it. That is wicked pride and a failure to remember her mom taught her differently and I'm going to get mad because her mother folded the towels differently than my mother?

We're forgetting our family of origin, we're forgetting God's great activity in variety in creating us. I'm forgetting, number 6, I'm forgetting who my God is. Anytime you run into a potential to sin, and if it's anger, if it's fighting, whatever it happens to be, stop and ask yourself a question: who am I going to worship in this moment? This is a worship issue. When we are confronted with temptation, we are being asked to serve our pleasures or serve the Lord. Pornography cries out, "Serve me! Serve me!" And you listen and you fall, but when you listen to God and say, no, he's better, he's worthy, I can certainly deny myself this because he denied himself of so much, and you kill it, you mortify the sin. In the moment, ask yourself the question: what am I going to worship? Am I going to worship my desire for peace? My desire for a clean home? My desire for children who never leave their toys on the lawn? Am I going to listen to that and worship it? Because that's what's going on in our hearts. Sin is a worship decision. When it comes to getting angry, we are basically making our pleasures, that's James 4 again, our pleasures an idol and we are serving it and we're giving it our obedience, and we worship it and we obey it. That's what's going on in our hearts when we fight, but conversely when we choose God and his ways, what are we doing? We're producing righteousness, we're doing righteously, we're producing peace, we're producing good fruit.

7. When you fight, you're forgetting what marriage is supposed to be. May I ask you, married couples, why did you get married? Did you think it through? I did not. Seriously, honestly I look back and I go, did I have any thoughts whatsoever? Was I, like, pondering anything deep? I met my wife in the basement of a church and from the moment I saw her ankles descend the stairs, I knew that was going to be my wife. Do you know why? Because I dug her. I like her. She hasn't said a thing. I like her. I can just tell by the way she comports herself. I like her. That was my reason for getting married. I like her. And I guess that's what you do, and then, I guess, you have kids. Why did you have kids? Uh, because, like, that's what they do in sitcoms and stuff? I had absolutely no idea what I was doing. May I ask you: why did you get married? What is the purpose of your marriage? Was it possibly that you wanted a companion? Fine to have that desire but if that's it, there's going to be a problem because that spouse isn't always going to provide that companionship. You want stability. That's fine. Your spouse is going to drop the ball, get the pink slip, maybe make a bad investment, and you are going to be crushed because you are building your marriage on stuff that is a perfectly fine desire but our marriages, if we're going to be biblical, are certainly about something more than just satisfying our own needs, is it not?

What does Paul talk about in Ephesians 5? What is marriage? It's a picture of the gospel. Sir, you play the role of Jesus, madam, you play the role of the church. The world looks into your windows, they see the gospel in action. That is what my marriage is about and when I forget that, uh-oh, I'm going to go for behavioral modification because, hey, hey, I want this house spotless because that's why I got married, or whatever the reason was. I go to war because I've got to have what this thing was intended to do. Our marriages can provide those things but our marriages were intended to paint a picture of God that is magnificent, to paint a picture to the world that says we don't fight in this house, we don't go to war, we don't get on each other's nerves in this house because we're about something else. And this is so practical because if your spouse goes about the business of sinning, you're just going to see it as an agitation, but when you see it as sin and you go, wait a second, my marriage is about the two of us walking hand-in-hand in the celestial city to hear, "Well done, good and faithful servant." Suddenly I do not see my spouse as doing something annoying, I'm seeing my spouse is in danger. My naughty children, they're not naughty, they're totally depraved, they're in danger here, they're behaving like totally depraved sinners. They need not just correction, they need a new view of Jesus Christ.

I challenge you, if you are ever having to deal with an issue in your house, if your goal is to win, I've got a pretty good sense that it's not going to go well, but if my goal in a conflict is that when we're done I want my spouse to love Jesus more, oh, good luck. Try that with your kids. Your kids do something naughty. You, dad, you come home and you expected Leave it to Beaver and you expected, ah, yes, I smell the lasagna, and the children are lined up in descending height, and their rooms are clean and it's perfect. But that's not how it goes down. You open the garage door and you hear it in your car, it is a cacophony of sinning going on, and you walk in and the Misses says to you, "Go deal with that boy," and you know what that means and you know where he is, he's in his

room and it's time for a spanking. Now go running up those stairs to deal with that kid because you expected perfect peace when you got home, you're taking off your belt and you stop and say, wait a second, I want my child to love Jesus more when I'm done. That's going to change your tune, isn't it? And what is happening? Your desires are being brought into conformity with God's will as we think on these things. Such practical implications. I don't want to criticize, I should want to encourage. I don't want my family at my feet, I should want them at the feet of Jesus. Why? Because that's what marriage and family is all about.

8. When you fight, you are perhaps forgetting their struggles. You don't know how you would even do in the situation that your spouse is confronted with. I couldn't understand years ago why my wife was not absolutely thrilled with me that I would come into the kitchen to fix things that she was preparing. I thought she should be so grateful that I entered into the kitchen to deal with this or that. And I don't know if you remember this, sweetheart, but you left a note on the counter and called me up and, I think, it was because one of the kids had to go to the doctor or to the hospital, and you said, "You need to make the chicken stroganoff." And I said, "Can't I take our child to the hospital?" And she said, "I've got everything set up. It's easy. It's chicken stroganoff, that cream, sour cream whatever it is, and you just boil it. The chicken is already sliced up for you, what more could you want? Just make it." So I get on it and I was killed it. I was absolutely slaying this chicken stroganoff. In comes Mrs. Friel with our child. She walks into the kitchen, goes to the stove and turns the heat down. "What do you think you're doing? How could you possibly judge me like that?" When you fight, you're forgetting what your spouse is actually dealing with. Remember there are forces, there are principalities, there are temptations, there's a flesh that is not yet glorified. Remember those things.

9. You're forgetting the differences between sins and preferences. This is so big. When you're thinking gospel, when I'm thinking Jesus, this house is supposed to reflect Jesus' relationship with his people, and you forget that, you're going to start seeing preferences as sins. It's unlikely you'll see sins as preferences. Let me give you a list of things. You tell me what they are, sin or preference. Ready? How your spouse dresses, sin or preference? How much your spouse weighs, sin or preference? Preference issue. Now obviously there could be sinful activities going on but on the face of it, how your spouse cooks, is this a preference or a sin? She likes spicy, you don't, is she sinning? No, she's not. How your spouse beats the children? [laughter] Okay, now we're talking sin here but when I'm trying to produce peace and righteousness, I stop and go, okay, my spouse who said "I do" before God and before people, something's going on in the heart of my spouse. I need to get in there and help as opposed to get in there and command and punish and yell at. Table manners, preference or sin? It's a sin actually because it really bugs me. If you don't hold your stuff right, hoo-hoo. How he does chores, he likes to do them Sunday at about 5 o'clock after the golf tournament is done. You would have preferred Saturday morning sharp. Is anybody sinning in this house? No, but when I forget the difference between preferences and sins, I go to war. How she keeps the house? Snoring? Chewing ice? That's my thing, by the way. Nail clipping, that's another thing that you could do to drive me crazy. Somebody here has a nail clipper, take it out, go ahead and just start to clip, clip, clipping. [laughter] Just go ahead and I'm just going

to be like [clenched teeth] this. And do you know why? It's because when I clip my nails, they make no noise. I don't know what's up with your nails.

10. You're forgetting God's patience with you.

11. You're forgetting you're not your spouse's Holy Spirit.

When you fight, you're forgetting how you change. Is it kindness or is it meanness?

13. You're forgetting your spouse's sin can be good for you. What? That's right because it's going to produce righteousness if you mortify the desires of flesh, you see your pleasures as being so insignificant and you see the pleasure of pleasing the Savior who died for you, you're going to be producing righteousness, you are going to become more sanctified, you're going to have more patience, more forgiveness, more agape love, more empathy and humility, fervency in prayer. Preparation for ministry, you're going to lean on Jesus more, you're going to long for heaven more where we won't be treating each other and tempted to go to the mattresses like we are. Look at what can happen in our hearts when we remember what we are forgetting. You can grow in bitterness or you can grow in the fruit of the Spirit. Marriage can polish you up or it can rub you raw. It's your choice. Will you behave earthly and demonic or heavenly and peaceable, that's the question before us?

14. You're forgetting the benefits of being peaceable. You're modeling Jesus, your spouse knows you're for them, you're encouraging, your spouse is growing in holiness not just behavioral change, your relationship builds and it grows in profound ways and you build up a bank so that on the days you biff it, there's a little bit of grace available to you.

And finally this, when we go to the mattresses, we are forgetting Jesus. We're forgetting our Savior who never shouted at anyone with sinful anger. He put little children on his knee. He comforted the brokenhearted and he speaks tenderly to us. God, because you're in Christ, never yells at you and me. Never. Jesus Christ never just boils over and just has to tell you how you have been destroying everything. Jesus acted like a servant who was silent before his accusers. He who did not open his mouth, he emptied himself, he humbled himself. When we are not acting like him, we're forgetting our Savior and that brings us to our close.

You have been drubbed by a lot of law. Maybe it didn't sound like that but it was, it was heavy-duty law because no doubt you, like I, by the way, these things didn't come out of the air. I know whereof I'm preaching. If you are feeling the weight of your sin, that is such a good thing but let me turn your eyes to Jesus. We need him, don't we? When you realize that when I go to war with my family, the depth of my sin, we suddenly appreciate the grace and the mercy of Jesus Christ, the one who never loses his temper, the one who elected you before eternity began, you, and he knew how much fighting you would do and he went, "You're Mine," and he came on a rescue mission to seek and to save that which is lost. And what did he do for us? He lived a perfect life of righteousness, gives that to us. He took the wrath of the Father so that we do not have to be punished for

eternity in a lake of sulfur. He offered us everlasting life. He provides for us power. He adopts us as his beloved children. He has made it possible for us to reign with him. All of that is ours in Jesus Christ.

How do we stop fighting? We start studying Jesus more. Look at your Savior. For every look at self, take 10 looks at him, and as you stare at Jesus with unveiled face, you will be transformed from one level of glory into another as you seek peace, stop fighting and produce more righteousness.

That was a lot, wasn't it? Perhaps today is the day that your family needs a bit of a house cleaning, that maybe there's been a fair amount of anger and fighting going on and it needs to be cleaned out. Maybe deal with that today. Why not today? Why not on the drive home? Why not til death do you part?

Let's pray.

Our Father, You are just that, our kind, benevolent, good, charitable, merciful, redeeming, saving, purchasing, condescending God that You would stoop to know us. We, today, have the experience that we are worse than we think. We acknowledge that but, Lord, don't leave us there. Look at Jesus, help us to see Him hanging on a cross while we were yet sinning, that You demonstrated Your love for us not that we first loved You but that You loved us and You gave Your Son as a propitiation for our sins that we should be loving one another because You have so lavishly loved us. So help us to find our balance as we leave this place. Let us be convicted by the law, as it appropriate, but let us exalt in the gospel of Jesus Christ, the God-man who died for raging, horrible, fighting, petty, pride monsters. In Jesus' name. Amen.