

A sunset over the ocean with a large rock in the foreground. The sky is filled with vibrant colors of orange, red, and purple, with the sun low on the horizon. The water is dark and reflects the colors of the sky. A large, dark rock is visible in the lower right foreground.

Contention

A Fools Lips Bring Strife

Compiled By Dr. Harold Bollinger

Contention

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Forward

Contention is striving against opposition:

As in battle

Deuteronomy 2:9

The Lord warned us, 'Do not bother the Moabites, the descendants of Lot, or start a war with them. I have given them Ar as their property, and I will not give you any of their land.' "

Both Moab and Ammon had removed a tall Anakim-like people usually known as the Rephaites, but called Emites by the Moabites and Zamzummites by the Ammonites (Deut. 2:20). If our enemies seem overwhelming, we must remember that God can deliver us as he did the Israelites.

Sometimes orally

Nehemiah 13:11

I immediately confronted the leaders and demanded, "Why has the Temple of God been neglected?" Then I called all the Levites back again and restored them to their proper duties.

Sometimes spiritually

By entering in opposition against Satan, we use not our own strength, but the Word of God. Declaring God's word and believing will put Satan to flight.

Chapter 1

Contention brings hostile separation from one another.

Jude 1:3

Dearly loved friends, I had been eagerly planning to write to you about the salvation we all share. But now I find that I must write about something else, urging you to defend the truth of the Good News. God gave this unchanging truth once for all time to his holy people.

Jude emphasizes the important relationship between correct doctrine and true faith. The truth of the Bible must not be compromised, because it gives us the real facts about Jesus and salvation. The Bible is inspired by God and should never be twisted or manipulated; when it is, we can become confused over right and wrong and lose sight of the only path that leads to eternal life. Before writing about salvation, then, Jude felt he had to set his readers back on the right track, calling them back to the basics of their faith. Then the way to salvation would be clearer. *Saints* refers to all believers.

"By pride cometh only contention"

Proverbs 13:10

Pride leads to arguments; those who take advice are wise.

“I was wrong” or “I need advice” are difficult phrases to utter because they require humility. Pride is an ingredient in every quarrel. It stirs up conflict and divides people. Humility, by contrast, heals. Guard against pride. If you find yourself constantly arguing, examine your life for pride. Be open to the advice of others, ask for help when you need it, and be willing to admit your mistakes.

The contentions at Corinth called forth the rebukes of Paul.

1 Corinthians 1:11

For some members of Chloe's household have told me about your arguments, dear brothers and sisters.

Paul founded the church in Corinth on his second missionary journey.

Eighteen months after he left, arguments and divisions arose, and some church members slipped back into an immoral life-style.

Paul wrote this letter to address the problems, to clear up confusion about right and wrong, and to remove the immorality among them. The Corinthian people had a reputation for jumping from fad to fad; Paul wanted to keep Christianity from degenerating into just another fad.

By saying “brothers,” Paul is emphasizing that all Christians are part of God’s family. Believers share a unity that runs even deeper than that of blood brothers and sisters.

To “agree with one another,” allow for “no divisions” and “be perfectly united in mind and thought” does not require everyone to believe exactly the same.

There is a difference between having opposing viewpoints and being divisive. A group of people will not completely agree on every issue, but they can work together harmoniously if they agree on what truly matters—Jesus Christ is Lord of all. In your church, speak and behave in a way that will reduce arguments and increase harmony. Petty differences should never divide Christians.

Do not bite and devour one another.

Galatians 5:15

But if you bite and devour one another, take care that you are not consumed by one another.

When we are not motivated by love, we become critical of others. We stop looking for good in them and see only their faults. Soon the unity of believers is broken. Have you talked behind someone's back?

Have you focused on others' shortcomings instead of their strengths? Remind yourself of Jesus' command to love others as you love yourself (Matthew 22:39). When you begin to feel critical of someone, make a list of that person's positive qualities.

If there are problems that need to be addressed, it is better to confront in love than to gossip.

Chapter 2

Seek after peace.

Psalm 120:7

I am for peace, but when I speak, they are for war.

Peacemaking is not always popular. Some people prefer to fight for what they believe in. The glory of battle is in the hope of winning, but someone must be a loser. The glory of peacemaking is that it may actually produce two winners. Peacemaking is God's way, so we should carefully and prayerfully attempt to be peacemakers.

The evil stir up wars.

Psalm 140:2

Who devise evil things in their hearts; they continually stir up wars.

David's hatred for his enemies came from his zeal for God. David regarded his enemies as God's enemies, so his hatred was a desire for God's righteous justice and not for personal vengeance.

Is it all right to be angry at people who hate God? Yes, but we must remember that it is God who will deal with them, not us. If we truly love God, then we will be deeply hurt if someone hates him.

David asked God to search his heart and mind and point out any wrong motives that may have been behind his strong words.

But while we seek justice against evil, we must also pray that God's enemies will turn to him before he judges them (see Matthew 5:44).

David asked God to search for sin and point it out, even to the level of testing his thoughts. This is exploratory surgery for sin. How are we to recognize sin unless God points it out?

Then, when God shows us, we can repent and be forgiven. Make this verse your prayer. If you ask the Lord to search your heart and your thoughts and to reveal your sin, you will be continuing on God's "way everlasting."

Anger stirs up strife.

Proverbs 15:18

A hot-tempered man stirs up strife, but the slow to anger calms a dispute.

The "path of the upright" doesn't always seem easy (Proverbs 15:19), but look at the alternatives.

Hatred (Proverbs 15:17), dissension (Proverbs 15:18), and laziness (Proverbs 15:19) cause problems that the upright person does not have to face.

By comparison, his or her life is a smooth, level road because it is built on a solid foundation of love for God.

Transgressors love strife.

Proverbs 17:19

He who loves transgression loves strife; He who raises his door seeks destruction.

Too many people are fair-weather friends. They stick around when the friendship helps them and leave when they're not getting anything out of the relationship.

Think of your friends and assess your loyalty to them. Be the kind of true friend the Bible encourages.

Fools lips bring strife.

Proverbs 18:6

A fool's lips bring strife, and his mouth calls for blows.

It is as hard to refuse to listen to gossip as it is to turn down a delicious dessert. Taking just one morsel of either one creates a taste for more. You can resist rumors the same way a determined dieter resists candy—never even open the box. If you don't nibble on the first bite of gossip, you can't take the second and the third.

A contentious man brings strife.

Proverbs 26:21

Like charcoal to hot embers and wood to fire, so is a contentious man to kindle strife.

Talking about every little irritation or piece of gossip only keeps the fires of anger going. Refusing to discuss those cuts the fuel line and makes the fires die out. Does someone continually irritate you? Decide not to complain about the person, and see if your irritation dies from lack of fuel.

Chapter 3

Strife exists and contention arises.

Habakkuk 1:3

Why do you make me see iniquity, and cause me to look on wickedness? Yes, destruction and violence are before me; Strife exists and contention arises.

Saddened by the violence and corruption he saw around him, Habakkuk poured out his heart to God. Today injustice is still rampant, but don't let your concern cause you to doubt God or rebel against him. Instead, consider the message that God gave Habakkuk and recognize God's long-range plans and purposes. Realize that God is doing right, even when you do not understand why he works as he does.

A foolish man swallows up wisdom.

Proverbs 21:20

There is precious treasure and oil in the dwelling of the wise, but a foolish man swallows it up.

This proverb is about saving for the future.

Easy credit has many people living on the edge of bankruptcy. The desire to keep up and to accumulate more pushes them to spend every penny they earn, and they stretch their credit to the limit. But anyone who spends all he has is spending more than he can afford.

A wise person puts money aside for when he or she may have less. God approves of foresight and restraint. God's people need to examine their life-styles to see whether their spending is God-pleasing or merely self-pleasing.

Chapter 4

The contentious spirit

Proverbs 17:19

He who loves transgression loves strife; He who raises his door seeks destruction.

What kind of friend are you? There is a vast difference between knowing someone well and being a true friend. The greatest evidence of genuine friendship is loyalty (loving “at all times”) (see 1 Cor. 13:7)—being available to help in times of distress or personal struggles.

A hot tempered man stirs up strife.

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By comparison, his or her life is a smooth, level road because it is built on a solid foundation of love for God.

Contention kindles strife.

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Chapter 5

Causes for contention

Proverbs 13:10

Through insolence comes nothing but strife, But wisdom is with those who receive counsel.

Pride is an ingredient in every quarrel. It stirs up conflict and divides people. Humility, by contrast, heals. Guard against pride. If you find yourself constantly arguing, examine your life for pride. Be open to the advice of others, ask for help when you need it, and be willing to admit your mistakes.

Contention among the disciples

Acts 15:38-39

But Paul kept insisting that they should not take him along who had deserted them in Pamphylia and had not gone with them to the work. And there occurred such a sharp disagreement that they separated from one another, and Barnabas took Mark with him and sailed away to Cyprus.

Paul and Barnabas disagreed sharply over Mark. Paul didn't want to take him along because he had left them earlier (Acts 13:13). This disagreement caused the two great preachers to form two teams, opening up two missionary endeavors instead of one. God works even through conflict and disagreements. Later, Mark became vital to Paul's ministry (Col. 4:10).

Christians do not always agree, but problems can be solved by agreeing to disagree and letting God work his will.

There were quarrels in the church.

1 Corinthians 1:11-13

For I have been informed concerning you, my brethren, by Chloe's people, that there are quarrels among you. Now I mean this, that each one of you is saying, "I am of Paul," and "I of Apollos," and "I of Cephas," and "I of Christ." Has Christ been divided? Paul was not crucified for you, was he? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul?

“Agree with one another,” allow for “no divisions” and “be perfectly united in mind and thought” does not require everyone to believe exactly the same. There is a difference between having opposing viewpoints and being divisive. A group of people will not completely agree on every issue, but they can work together harmoniously if they agree on what truly matters—Jesus Christ is Lord of all. In your church, speak and behave in a way that will reduce arguments and increase harmony. Petty differences should never divide Christians.

In this large and diverse Corinthian church, the believers favored different preachers. Because there was as yet no written New Testament, the believers depended heavily on preaching and teaching for spiritual insight into the meaning of the Old Testament.

Some followed Paul, who had founded their church; some who had heard Peter (Cephas) in Jerusalem followed him; while others listened only to Apollos, an eloquent and popular preacher who had had a dynamic ministry in Corinth (Acts 18:24; Acts 19:1).

Although these three preachers were united in their message, their personalities attracted different people. At this time the church was in danger of dividing. By mentioning Jesus Christ ten times in the first ten verses, Paul makes it clear who it is all preachers and teachers should emphasize. God’s message is much more important than any human messenger.

Paul wondered whether the Corinthians’ quarrels had “divided” Christ. This is a graphic picture of what happens when the church (the body of Christ) is divided. With the many churches and styles of worship available today, we could get caught up in the same game of “my preacher is better than yours!” To do so would divide

Christ again. But Christ is not divided, and his true followers should not allow anything to divide them. Don't let your appreciation for any teacher, preacher, or author led you into intellectual pride. Our allegiance must be to Christ and to the unity that he desires.

Be not consumed by one another.

Galatians 5:15

But if you bite and devour one another, take care that you are not consumed by one another.

When we are not motivated by love, we become critical of others. We stop looking for good in them and see only their faults.

Soon the unity of believers is broken. Have you talked behind someone's back? Have you focused on others' shortcomings instead of their strengths? Remind yourself of Jesus' command to love others as you love yourself (Matthew 22:39).

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Chapter 6

Solutions for contention:

Avoid Foolish Controversies.

Titus 3:9

But avoid foolish controversies and genealogies and strife and disputes about the Law, for they are unprofitable and worthless.

Paul warned Titus, as he warned Timothy, not to get involved in foolish and unprofitable arguments (2 Tim. 2:14). This does not mean we should refuse to study, discuss, and examine different interpretations of difficult Bible passages. Paul is warning against petty quarrels, not honest discussion that leads to wisdom. As foolish arguments develop, it is best to turn the discussion back to a helpful direction or politely excuse yourself.

The false teachers were basing their heresies on genealogies and speculations about the law (see 1 Tim. 1:3-4). Similar to the methods used by false teachers in Ephesus and Colosse, they were building their case on genealogies of angels. We should avoid false teachers, not even bothering to react to their pretentious positions. Our overreaction can sometimes give more attention to their points of view.

A person must be warned when he or she is causing division that threatens the unity of the church. This warning should not be a heavy-handed action, but it is intended to correct the individual's divisive nature and restore him or her to fellowship. A person who refuses to be corrected should be put outside the fellowship. As Paul said, that person is "self-condemned"—he or she is sinning and knows it. (See also Matthew 18:15-18 and 2 Thes. 3:14-15 for help in handling such problems in the church.)

Abandon quarrels before they begin.

Proverbs 17:14

The beginning of strife is like letting out water, so abandon the quarrel before it breaks out.

When possible, work together in peace.

Romans 12:18

If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men.

Truth is always timely; it applies today and in the future. Because it is connected with God's changeless character, it is also changeless. Think for a moment about the centuries that have passed since these proverbs were written. Consider the countless hours that have been spent carefully studying every sentence of Scripture. The Bible has withstood the test of time. Because God is truth, you can trust his Word to guide you.

Pursue peace with everyone.

Hebrews 12:14

Pursue peace with all men, and the sanctification without which no one will see the Lord.

The readers were familiar with the ceremonial cleansing ritual that prepared them for worship, and they knew that they had to be holy or clean in order to enter the temple. Sin always blocks our vision of God; so if we want to see God, we must renounce sin and obey him (see Psalm 24:3-4). Holiness is coupled with living in peace. A right relationship with God leads to right relationships with fellow believers. Although we will not always feel loving toward all other believers, we must pursue peace as we become more Christlike.

Peacemakers

The peacemakers are the children of God.

Matthew 5:9

"Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.

There are at least four ways to understand the Beatitudes. (1) They are a code of ethics for the disciples and a standard of conduct for all believers. (2) They contrast kingdom values (what is eternal) with worldly values (what is temporary). (3) They contrast the superficial “faith” of the Pharisees with the real faith Christ wants. (4) They show how the Old Testament expectations will be fulfilled in the new kingdom. These beatitudes are not multiple choice—pick what you like and leave the rest. They must be taken as a whole. They describe what we should be like as Christ’s followers.

Those who devise evil have a heart of deceit.

Proverbs 12:20

Deceit is in the heart of those who devise evil, but counselors of peace have joy.

Chapter 7

Build up one another.

Romans 14:19

So then we pursue the things which make for peace and the building up of one another.

Sin is not just a private matter. Everything we do affects others, and we have to think of them constantly. God created us to be interdependent, not independent.

We who are strong in our faith must, without pride or condescension, treat others with love, patience, and self-restraint.

Seek peace with all men.

Romans 12:18

If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men.

These verses summarize the core of Christian living. If we love someone the way Christ loves us, we will be willing to forgive.

If we have experienced God's grace, we will want to pass it on to others. And remember, grace is *undeserved* favor. By giving an enemy a drink, we're not excusing his misdeeds. We're recognizing him, forgiving him, and loving him in spite of his sins—just as Christ did for us.

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God's wisdom is from above.

James 3:17

But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, reasonable, full of mercy and good fruits, unwavering, without hypocrisy.

Have you ever known anyone who claimed to be wise but who acted foolishly? True wisdom can be measured by the depth of a person's character. Just as you can identify a tree by the type of fruit it produces, you can evaluate your wisdom by the way you act. Foolishness leads to disorder, but wisdom leads to peace and goodness. Are you tempted to escalate the conflict, pass on the gossip, or fan the fire of discord? Careful, winsome speech and wise, loving words are the seeds of peace. God loves peacemakers (Matthew 5:9).

"Bitter envy and selfish ambition" are inspired by the devil. It is easy for us to be drawn into wrong desires by the pressures of society and sometimes even by well-meaning Christians. By listening to the advice: "Assert yourself," "Go for it," "Set high goals," we can be drawn into greed and destructive competitiveness. Seeking God's wisdom delivers us from the need to compare ourselves to others and to want what they have.

Contention against Jesus

Isaiah 53:5

But He was pierced through for our transgressions, He was crushed for our iniquities; the chastening for our well-being fell upon Him, and by His scourging we are healed.

How could an Old Testament person understand the idea of Christ dying for our sins (our transgressions and iniquities)—actually bearing the punishment that we deserved? The sacrifices suggested this idea, but it is one thing to kill a lamb, and something quite different to think of God’s chosen servant as that Lamb.

But God was pulling aside the curtain of time to let the people of Isaiah’s day look ahead to the suffering of the future Messiah and the resulting forgiveness made available to all mankind.

To ask Jesus to come into your heart please pray this Prayer:

Dear Lord Jesus, I believe you are the Christ, the Son of the Living God. I ask you to forgive me of my sins and coming into my heart. I accept you as savior and will follow you as Lord. Amen.

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