



**LESSON 13:** "Contentious Charlie" **Date:** \_\_\_\_\_  
**KEY VERSE:** Proverbs 17:1 – *"Better is a dry morsel, and quietness therewith, than an house full of sacrifices with strife."*

### INTRODUCTION

Situations of strife and contention are not new to many people. Overcrowded courts bear witness to the fact that many individuals are involved in contentious situations. An inflated divorce rate testifies that many couples live in strife. "Contention" and "strife" are outward manifestations of man's inner "anger" and "wrath." Generally speaking, when the writers of proverbs spoke of "strife" and "contention," they referred to verbal battles between rivals holding different viewpoints. On rare occasions the Hebrew word was a bit more colorful. These occasions will be pointed to as they appear in this lesson.

We often laugh about contention. Entire comedies have been built upon the theme of a contentious relationship, but in reality as one lives in such an atmosphere, the results are far from humorous. Because of the ill effects of "contention" and "strife," the "wise" will do well to understand the causes of these situations and avoid their dangers.

**Theme:** Wise believers are aware of and will avoid contention.

God's word places great value on living lives free of strife (Prov. 20:3). In Romans 12:18, the Christian is challenged, "If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men." Let's allow the book of Proverbs to answer three frequently asked questions about contention.

### IS CONTENTION DANGEROUS?

Have you ever heard of the "Chinese water torture?" It was a simple torture designed to drive a man out of his mind. The victim was tied down and a dripping device was placed over his head. Hour after hour the water rhythmically dripped on the forehead of the tortured man

until he was left begging for mercy. Proverbs compares contention and strife to dripping water (Proverbs 19:13, 27:15). When left to drip, these situations will destroy. Therefore, the "wise" man will see the value of avoiding such a life. Proverbs is so emphatic about the seriousness of living a life free from contention that the writers recommend that a man should live alone rather than in a contentious relationship. "It is better to dwell in the wilderness, than with a contentious and an angry woman" (21:19). "Better is a dry morsel, and quietness therewith, than a house full of sacrifices with strife" (17:1). Proverbs presents two reasons for concluding that strife is dangerous.

#### 1. **Contention can become uncontrollable (Prov. 17:14).**

The first reason is perhaps the most obvious. It is found in chapter 17, verse 14. "The beginning of strife is as when one letteth out water." Little contentions grow into huge problems. The picture is reminiscent of the little Dutch boy standing with his finger plugging the trickling dike. If the boy removes his finger, the hole will grow larger and the water will destroy many. Beware, that little scuffle may become a serious battle. "Therefore leave off contention, before it be meddled with" (Prov. 17:14).

#### 2. **Contention can take away any hope of reconciliation (Prov. 29:9).**

The second reason for concluding that strife is dangerous is found in Proverbs 29:9. "If a wise man contendeth with a foolish man, whether he rage or laugh, there is no rest." The word translated "contend" in this verse pictured a legal argument. The author is telling his readers that it is possible to win a legal battle and find no happiness. How often courtroom participants find this statement to be sadly true. There are some fights with no winners – only losers.

**Transition:** Because the dangers of strife are so real, we are wise to consider carefully what causes contention.

## WHAT CAUSES CONTENTION?

Proverbs presents many causes of strife. By noting these causes, the wise man can learn to avoid strife. Let us note the following:

### 1. ***Pride (Prov. 13:10)***

“Only by pride cometh contention.” Proud men are fighting men. We’ve all met people who have never mastered the ability to admit that they were mistaken. We must carefully avoid associating with or becoming such a man.

### 2. ***Hatred (Prov. 10:12)***

“Hatred stirreth up strifes: but love covereth all sins.” A fighting church is a hating church. A fighting man is a hating man. Hatred cannot be permanently contained; it will cause strife.

### 3. ***Gossip (Prov. 26:20)***

“Where there is no talebearer, the strife ceaseth.” A word whispered in secret will cause open warfare! We must constantly guard our tongues. Proverbs places a great deal of emphasis upon the tongue. Small wonder! The tongue, though a small member, holds indomitable might (James 3). The gossiping individual will also be a contentious individual. Remember that when choosing a friend. If you would avoid contentious friendships, avoid the gossip.

### 4. ***Drunkenness (Prov. 23:29)***

The question “who hath contentions?” is answered in the following verse: “They that tarry long at the wine.” The cowboy fights in bars that are presented in western films is accurate. Alcohol lowers man’s natural inhibitions and the results may become violent.

### 5. ***Hastiness (Prov. 25:8)***

The wise son is warned, “Go not forth hastily to strive, lest thou know not what to do in the end thereof, when thy neighbor hath put thee to shame.” The inner “anger” and “wrath” must be capped or strife will result. “Haste makes waste” in our

physical duties, but also in our social relationships. The abusive parent should well be warned to pause prior to reacting. The contentious person will do well to avoid hasty conclusions which result in unwarranted confrontations.

### 6. ***Insults (Prov. 18:19)***

“A brother offended is harder to be won than a strong city; and their contentions are like the bars of a castle.” An offended man is a contentious man. You will never get along with those that you purposely or inadvertently offend. For this reason the wise man would do well to avoid sarcasm. It is a dangerous form of humor. Always remember do not laugh at something that someone cannot change and do not laugh when the “victim” is not laughing.

Proverbs also presents three types of individuals who will cause strife. The fool (18:6), the scorner (22:20), and the forward (16:28). Fools demonstrate no fear of God. Scorners have not yet crossed the line and rejected God but their words prove that their heart is moving away from the Lord. Forward individuals are “crooked” and not to be trusted.

**Transition:** The causes for strife are many and the results devastating. Therefore, strife must be avoided. This is done by considering these biblical suggestions and learning to avoid strife.

## CAN WE AVOID CONTENTION?

There are at least four proverbial suggestions to be considered in order to avoid strife. They would include the following:

### 1. ***Learn how to compromise (Prov. 18:18).***

“The lot causeth contentions to cease, and parteth between the mighty.” Politicians learn to be great compromisers. At times this art is appropriate in the lives of Christians. It was Thomas Jefferson who suggested that we should learn “in matters of preference, flow with the stream; in matters of conviction, stand like a rock.” Doctrinally we must be unmovable; but when the issue is personal preference, compromise is a good policy. In the Old Testament times, contentions were sometimes settled

by using the “lot.” It was similar to “drawing straws,” a game of chance in which the participants decide the course of action prior to determining the winner. According to the author of Proverbs, this could often settle skirmishes. At times compromising a preference will allow contentions to cease just like casting lots.

**2. *Don't argue without a good reason (Prov. 3:30).***

“Strive not with a man without cause.” This is so simple it sounds absurd, but we must not be of the temperament of those who love nothing better than a battle. While in college I met a young man who enjoyed debating. He won honors as a debater and often boasted that he could argue either side of almost every contemporary issue. In a debate his talents were useful, but socially he was an accident looking for a place to happen. Those that enjoy being the devil’s advocate are not terribly particular about the companion that they have chosen.

**3. *Learn to practice biblical love (Prov. 10:12).***

“Hatred stirreth up strifes: but love covereth all sins.” Biblical love is sacrificial love. “For god so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten son” (John 3:16). Jesus’ love was sacrificial, God’s love was sacrificial, and our love must be, too. In learning to truly love, you will avoid contention and strife. You will sacrifice your opinions and your “rights” in deference to others. In so doing you will live a life of biblical peace. Our day teaches us to stand up for what is “ours.” To fight for our “ideas.” God’s Word teaches us to honor our relationships through sacrificial love. Thus, we will avoid strife and its dreadful effects.

**4. *Be slow to anger (Prov. 15:18).***

“He that is slow to anger appeaseth strife.” The inner tumult must cease for the exterior eruptions to desist. Our tempers must be maintained for our friendships to be maintained. We must learn to still the inner storms, to be well-conditioned and to hate strife more than we hate being offended. The man slow to anger will avoid strife.

As Christians we should be known for our peaceful dispositions, not our quick tempers. There is no honor in strife and contention for “it is an honour for a man to cease from strife” (Prov. 20:3). This is not the message being communicated in our world. We are being taught by our secular society to bully our way to success. We are learning that might makes right. God’s Word places great value on avoiding the “anger” and “wrath” which lead to “strife” and “contention.” The man of strife will pay for his arguments physically, emotionally, and socially. The man of peace will be loved of God and his peers.