

# The Contender

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I knew exactly what to expect when I got there. It would be the same as the last time and the time before that. And I would be subjected to an endless recital of the way in which he was not appreciated by his family, the wrongs done by them to each other and, even worse, to himself. I would be expected to fill the role of a passive listener whose only contribution to the conversation would be to agree that he was the most unappreciated and mistreated husband confined to this planet.

It was a difficult situation to face for most certainly I could not agree that everyone else but he, was at fault. Rather, for a very definite and specific reason, he was the major culprit in the seething cauldron that should have been a garden of peace in which flourished the tender plants of a growing family.

But, over the multiplied years, he had so continuously argued to himself and to anyone who would listen that he was virtuously possessed only of the best intentions; desired naught but the unity and happiness of his family, that he would certainly have achieved but for the frustrations but-tressed across his way by his unloving and unlovable spouse and offspring, that it was virtually impossible to divert his attention to anything else but these now deeply set convictions.

For me to bluntly tell him to his face what his trouble was, would solve nothing for it would instantly antagonize him. Distorted thinking would make it impossible for him to understand either my intentions or my message resulting in his quickly cataloging me as his wife's accomplice against him.

Repeatedly I had endeavoured to turn this poor soul to the selfless example of Jesus and called upon him to obtain a living experience in the gospel but, while he had even admitted a

need, he was too preoccupied with his own personal problem to do anything about the other.

I no longer visit this man. Sad to say, every attempt made by myself and others to help him has failed and he has elected to continue submerged in his own self-pity and to continue his ever more hopeless attempts to establish himself at the head of his own house.

This man was absolutely within his rights when he claimed that he should be the head of his own home, that the family should love and respect him and give him the honor and obedience that was his due.

His desire that the family should be happy, prosperous and united was a perfectly legitimate one. There can be no question but that he worked with all the energy and persistence at his command to achieve these goals. Twenty years after the struggle began he was still pressing with might and main for the victory.

What then, was the trouble? Why had he not experienced success after all this time? Why was it that the family was more and more set against him as time went by? As he looked on his motives as he saw them, as he considered his rights, as he considered what he was trying to achieve in the family, he saw nothing that he could question.

Therefore, he concluded that his side was without stain and all the fault lay with the others, not with himself. Having determined that, he simply exerted all the more pressure to bring them into line, while they mounted stiffer resistance. Thus the passing of time only intensified the struggle, but never resolved it.

That man was making a mistake so common that all need to see it and learn the lesson it provides. The story is told here, not to condemn that man or his family, but simply to provide a mirror whereby each may see the existence of the

same problem in himself and turn away from making the same mistake in his own life and practice.

The family was not what he thought they were. They were what he had made them. Yet he was not wholly wrong. It was his right to be the head of the family. There is no question about that. But while he was correct in recognizing that, his error lay in demanding it and contending for it.

Which brings us to this great truth: anyone who contends for his rights no matter how rightfully he should have them, will separate himself farther and farther from them, while, at the same time, breeding discontent and strife between all parties concerned. Power blocs will be formed and set up in deadly opposition to each other; those who were once friends will become enemies; fellowship will chill into frosty separations and vast damage will be done to human relations. Heaven will be far away.

*There is no policy more self-defeating  
than contending for one's rights.*

This is why Jesus knew only success for

**The Desire of Ages, p. 89:**

Jesus did not contend for His rights. Often His work was made unnecessarily severe because He was willing and uncomplaining. Yet He did not fail nor become discouraged. He lived above these difficulties, as if in the light of God's countenance. He did not retaliate when roughly used, but bore insult patiently.

Was there ever anyone who had greater rights upon this earth than He? Assuredly not! Everyone owed Him the highest respect and reverence. Everybody! Yet He never demanded it, never contended for it, never complained nor became discouraged when He did not receive that which was rightfully His. In this He has lived out for us the secret of success in life on this earth.

If the individual presented above as the illustration of the opposite course had dismissed from his mind his great concern about being the rightful head of the house, had put away all complaining and discouragement, and had meekly labored day by day to serve his family with loving tenderness, then he would eventually have discovered himself at the head of the house. If he did not, then it would have been their fault, not his.

Yet, it is hard to think of anything more difficult for a person to do than surrender the struggle for his rights.

Dear Reader, especially if you have strife in your family, business circle, church body or any other place, carefully examine yourself to see if you are in any way at all contending for your rights. Plead with the Lord to open your eyes to see yourself as you really are and to give you the grace to put away this spirit. Then, if every reader will do this, what a change will take place in the situation where you are. It will be almost unbelievable.

The example of Christ was so beautiful and singular that it could not escape notice. Often He was asked for an explanation of His behavior. The reply He gave was indeed amazing. Note the revelation of that reply in the following statement.

**The Desire of Ages, p. 89:**

Again and again He was asked, Why do You submit to such spiteful usage, even from Your brothers? "It is written," He said, "My son, forget not My Law; but let thine heart keep My commandments: for length of days, and long life, and peace, shall they add to thee. Let not mercy and truth forsake thee: bind them about thy neck; write them upon the table of thine heart: so shalt thou find favour and good understanding in the sight of God and man." *Proverbs 3:1-4*

Jesus did not contend for His rights because it is the law of God not to. I suppose that not too many, if any of us, have read the law in this way. We have seen it as a list of "Thou shalt nots," and not as the revelation of the principle that the

child of God does not contend for his rights.

Yet Christ's words reveal that this is the very teaching of the law of God. Therefore, it is evident to all those of us who think that we have been so faithfully keeping the law of God and yet have been guilty of contending for our rights, that we need to develop a far deeper and better understanding of the law than we have heretofore.

From the life of Christ then we conclude,

Utter refusal to contend for our rights, is the keeping of the law of God, and this is the way of adding length of days, long life and peace.

Conversely then,

Contention for our rights, no matter how light, is the breaking of the law of God, and will take away from us length of days, long life and peace.

It is a hard lesson to learn. Can you learn it? It is so unnatural for the human being to do so. What a wonderful challenge confronts you in this!

As you consider the way of no contention, you can see yourself being inconvenienced, put to unnecessary labour and effort, enduring misunderstanding and consequent suffering and being denied again and again that which is rightfully yours. Nor are these fears ill-founded for this is exactly what you will experience as you embark on this way of life. Christ embarked on this as a way of life and this is exactly what He had to suffer from day to day.

So you may argue,

“What is the sense in such a way? Surely I am better off if I set to work to ensure that I am accorded my rights. After all they are my rights. I am not asking for anything which is not rightfully mine and it is clear that if I do not contend for them no one else will do it for me for they are preoccupied with fighting for their rights.”

No, you are vastly worse off when you contend for your rights. You can guarantee that there will be strife; that you will never really be accorded what you believe to be your rights. You may even gain possession of them by the sheer power of your wealth or influence, but you will not really be accorded them in the hearts of those who are forced to serve you. They will recognize you only on a temporary basis abiding the time when they can dispossess you of them to their own advantage.

Jesus said, "Follow Me."

Will we do it? He never contended for His rights. Thus He obeyed the deepest and most beautiful principles of the law to perfection. When inconvenienced or put to unnecessary hardship, He refused to be discouraged or to complain. In doing all this Jesus said, "Follow Me."

May we respond in heart and life by never contending for our rights, as the expression of the keeping of the law in its true beauty and then we shall know length of days, long life, and peace.