

"That There May Not Be So Much Contention"

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"And he commanded them that there should be no contention one with another, but that they should look forward with one eye, having their hearts knit together in unity and in love one towards another" (Mosiah 18:21).

The gospel provides ways to help us deal with contention.

Contention Is Destructive

The Lord revealed to Joseph Smith that one reason for the restoration of the gospel was "that there may not be so much contention" (D&C 10:63). Throughout the scriptures the Lord has warned that "there should be no contention one with another" (Mosiah 18:21).

The frequent warnings the Lord gives us about contention seem to indicate that contention is a common problem. Nowhere is this problem more evident than in the home, where it can be very destructive. Contention creates pressure and tension as well as hurt and angry feelings that can damage relationships. If uncontrolled, it can lead to spouse and child abuse and other serious consequences.

"If Satan can succeed in creating in us habits of arguing, quarreling, and contention, it is easier then for him to bind us with the heavier sins which can destroy our eternal lives. A contentious spirit can affect almost any phase of our lives" (Marvin J. Ashton, in Conference Report, Apr. 1978, p. 12; or *Ensign*, May 1978, p. 9).

Any time that people must interact with one another in the home, at work, at church, or in any other situation, there is the possibility that contention will arise. Contention means argument, dispute, quarreling, or discord. Everyone has different likes and dislikes. We cannot always expect to be in agreement, but we need not allow differences of opinion to lead to contention.

It is easier to control anger and avoid contention if we identify what causes these feelings. Some basic causes are selfishness,

jealousy, pride, and stress. A child who has a low sense of self-worth, who feels insecure in his relationships, or who feels jealous or resentful of siblings is apt to be angry and contentious. The same principles apply to adults.

Pressures both in and out of the home, frustrations, and disappointments can create a high level of tension in family members of all ages. Sometimes we or our children do not know how to deal with tensions or hostile feelings in a productive or nondestructive way. We may find release for a guilty conscience in anger and contention. We may dwell on another's faults or magnify petty differences into major issues, thus causing anger and resentment. We may respond to hurt or pain, either physical or psychological, by becoming angry at others.

The relationship of parents with each other is an important factor in causing or minimizing contention. When a father and mother treat each other with respect, show love, and settle differences with discussion and good humor, there is less contention in the home. When parents fail to show love and respect, do not communicate well, or settle differences with loud language and uncontrolled anger, children learn from their example.

The Scriptures Suggest Ways to Manage Contention

Many would have us believe that arguing and quarreling are a normal release for our feelings and even emotionally healthy. But the Lord teaches us otherwise. As explained in Mosiah 4:14-15, we are to teach our children not to quarrel but rather to love and serve one another.

Many scriptures give us help in solving the problem of contention.

Mosiah 18:21—Promote Unity and Love

When Alma was teaching the Nephites to prepare them for baptism, he "commanded them that there should be no contention one with another." Then he gave them a key to obeying this commandment: their hearts should be "knit together in unity and in love one towards another" (Mosiah 18:21). We teach love in our families when we show affection and respect for each family member, letting them know how important and valuable they are to us and to the Lord. We express love by giving time, attention, and service to one another. We can build unity in our homes by doing things together—praying, playing, working, eating, talking, and attending Church meetings together.

Proverbs 13:10—Beware of Pride and Selfishness

In this scripture we are warned: "Only by pride cometh contention." When we think first of ourselves, setting our own

opinions and desires before those of others, we are cultivating selfishness and pride. President Gordon B. Hinckley said: "Selfishness is the canker that drives out peace and love. Selfishness is the root on which grow argument, anger, disrespect, infidelity, and divorce" (in Conference Report, Apr. 1982, p. 68; or *Ensign*, May 1982, p. 45). When parents always think first of themselves, children may be unwanted or neglected, seldom listened to, or seen as burdens. Selfish children often become manipulative, self-centered, and greedy.

4 Nephi 1:2—Deal Justly One with Another

Following Jesus' personal ministry among the Nephites, "the people were all converted unto the Lord, . . . and there were no contentions and disputations among them, and every man did deal justly one with another" (4 Nephi 1:2). Parents have the responsibility to direct the affairs of their home, but their authority needs to be exercised justly and as the Lord has directed.

President Gordon B. Hinckley explained: "Discipline with severity, discipline with cruelty, inevitably leads not to correction, but rather to resentment and bitterness. It cures nothing. It only aggravates the problem. It is self-defeating. The Lord, in setting forth the spirit of governance in his Church, has also set forth the spirit of governance in the home in these great words of revelation:

" 'No power or influence can or ought to be maintained . . . , only by persuasion, by long-suffering, by gentleness and meekness, and by love unfeigned; . . .

" 'Reproving betimes with sharpness, when moved upon by the Holy Ghost [and only then I think]; and then showing forth afterwards an increase of love toward him whom thou hast reproved, lest he esteem thee to be his enemy;

" 'That he may know that thy faithfulness is stronger than the cords of death.' (D&C 121:41, 43–44.)

"Wrote Paul to the Ephesians: 'And ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath: but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.' (Eph. 6:4.)

"When little problems occur, as they inevitably will, restrain yourself. Call to mind the wisdom of the ancient proverb: 'A soft answer turneth away wrath.' (Prov. 15:1.)

"There is no discipline in all the world like the discipline of love. It has a magic all its own" ("The Environment of Our Homes," *Ensign*, June 1985, p. 6).

3 Nephi 18:18–21 — Pray Always

In this scripture, the Savior taught the Nephites to "watch and pray always" and to "pray in your families unto the Father, always in my name, that your wives and your children may be blessed."

Elder F. Enzo Busche tells how he resolved a conflict by praying for guidance:

"One day when circumstances made it necessary for me to be at home at an unusual time, I witnessed from another room how our eleven-year-old son, just returning from school, was directing ugly words towards his younger sister. They were words that offended me—words that I had never thought our son would use. My first natural reaction in my anger was to get up and go after him. Fortunately, I had to walk across the room and open a door before I could reach him, and I remember in those few seconds I fervently prayed to my Heavenly Father to help me to handle the situation. Peace came over me. I was no longer angry.

"Our son, being shocked to see me home, was filled with fear when I approached him. To my surprise I heard myself saying, 'Welcome home, son!' and I extended my hand as a greeting. And then in a formal style I invited him to sit close to me in the living room for a personal talk. I heard myself expressing my love for him. I talked with him about the battle that every one of us has to fight each day within ourselves.

"As I expressed my confidence in him, he broke into tears, confessing his unworthiness and condemning himself beyond measure. Now it was my role to put his transgression in the proper perspective and to comfort him. A wonderful spirit came over us, and we ended up crying together, hugging each other in love and finally in joy. What could have been a disastrous confrontation between father and son became, through the help from the powers above, one of the most beautiful experiences of our relationship that we both have never forgotten" (in Conference Report, Apr. 1982, pp. 98–99; or *Ensign*, May 1982, p. 70).

We will have more harmony in our homes as we seek the Lord's help in controlling negative feelings and overcoming differences. If we humbly acknowledge our weaknesses, the Lord will help us to change them to strengths. Changing habits and patterns of behavior that are well established is not easy and requires consistent effort. We may make good progress and then find ourselves slipping backward again. If we persist, with God's help, we can gradually make the changes that will improve our personal and home lives.

Suggestions for Teachers

1. Read 3 Nephi 11:29 and Elder Ashton's statement. Ask: Why are various forms of contention, such as anger and arguments, so damaging to families? What are some of the causes of contention that you have seen in families?
2. Read Mosiah 4:14–15. Ask the sisters to share suggestions for teaching children not to fight and quarrel.
3. Read Doctrine and Covenants 121:41–44 and Proverbs 15:1. Ask the sisters to share suggestions for disciplining children in the spirit of these scriptures. You might use Elder Busche's experience or another experience as an example.
4. Read 3 Nephi 12:9, and ask the sisters to ponder how they could be peacemakers in their homes.