



FIGHT VALIANTLY

Contending for the Faith
against False Teaching
in the Church

*Thirty Theses on
Contending*

Lee Gatiss



Church Society

EQUIPPING GOD'S
PEOPLE TO LIVE
GOD'S WORD

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Thirty Theses on Contending

Contending is not a mere worldly exercise, but an application of the gospel itself both personally and corporately. It must involve boundaries and saying no to various things, as true love always does; but this ought to be done in a way that is courteous and godly, consistent with what the gospel tells us about ourselves. Each of these aspects are vital for the task of biblical contending, and to neglect any one of them would hamstring our efforts.

We could further expand this definition with thirty theses or propositions which unpack the indicatives and imperatives of this spiritual discipline. Why not ponder these slowly, and pray each one into your own heart and situation, before we move on to think further about specific applications in the following chapters? You may also like to ponder how your church can be better equipped to understand and contend in each of these areas.

Contending is not a worldly exercise

1. We do not contend against flesh and blood, but against demonic powers and our adversary the devil (Ephesians 6:12; 1 Peter 5:18).
2. We do not merely contend *against* something but *for* the faith, *for* the gospel (Jude 3; Philippians 4:3).
3. We do not contend in a violent way for Jesus's kingdom as if it were an earthly kingdom (John 18:36).

Contending is applying the gospel

4. We contend by proclaiming the gospel (Colossians 1:28–29).
5. We contend by praying (Romans 15:30).
6. We contend against sin in our own lives, which wages war against us and which false teaching uses to get a grip on us (Hebrews 12:4; 1 Peter 2:11; Romans 16:18; 1 Timothy 6:3–5; 2 Timothy 3:6, 4:3–4).
7. We contend side-by-side with other Christians in a way that is worthy of the gospel, united and unfazed by opposition (Philippians 1:27–30), striving to maintain our unity (Ephesians 4:3; 2 Timothy 2:22).
8. We contend by rejoicing in the Lord, focusing on the positive, and prayerfully practicing what Paul preached and lived (Philippians 4; 2 Thessalonians 2:15), with thanksgiving (Colossians 2:7).
9. We contend by not conforming to error but continuing in the truth and remaining stable (2 Timothy 3:10, 14, 4:5; Ephesians 4:14; 2 Peter 3:17), that is, not changing our gospel or our moral and ethical applications of it, which certain people would like us to (Galatians 1:8–9; Jude 3).
10. We contend by building up the church in the faith, keeping ourselves in the love of God, and growing in grace and knowledge (Jude 20; 2 Peter 3:18; 1 Timothy 4:16).
11. We contend by having mercy on those who doubt and saving those who wander (Jude 22–23; James 5:19–20).

Contending must include drawing lines

12. We contend against ambitious worldliness, and immoral paganism rising up from within the church, from which we must differentiate ourselves (Acts 20:29–30; 1–2 Corinthians; James 3–4).
13. We contend by avoiding those who persistently cause divisions by false doctrine and living (Romans 16:17–20; Titus 3:10–11).
14. We contend by removing immoral professing Christians from the church and not associating or eating with them (1 Corinthians 5).
15. We contend by refusing to be in partnership with idolatrous or immoral people who deny that their deceptive words bring God’s judgment (Ephesians 5:7; 2 Thessalonians 2:3; 1 John 2:26–27).
16. We contend by not listening to false gospels (Galatians 1:8–9) and carefully avoiding gospels based on purely human philosophy and tradition (Colossians 2).
17. We contend by preventing false teachers from having positions of responsibility and teaching, where we have the authority (1 Timothy 1:3; Titus 1:11), and only appointing those who are able and reliable (1 Timothy 3:1–13; Titus 1:5–9).
18. We contend by teaching people to distinguish truth from error clearly (1 Timothy 4; Titus 1:9, 13; Jude), testing the spirits and listening to apostolic teaching (1 John 4).
19. We contend by steering clear of charlatans and the irreverent babble which leads people astray doctrinally and morally (Numbers 16; 2 Timothy 2:16–18; 3:1–9).

20. We contend by not receiving or supporting deceivers and thereby taking part in their wicked works (2 John).
21. We contend by not tolerating heresy and immorality within the church (Revelation 2).

Contending means engaging in a godly way

22. We contend with humility, gentleness, and persuasion (2 Corinthians 10:1–6).
23. We contend with sober-mindedness, enduring persecution, suffering, and opposition (2 Timothy 3:12; 4:5; 1 Peter).
24. We contend by engaging with opponents carefully, gently, kindly, and patiently in unity with others (2 Timothy 2:22–25).
25. We contend by prayerfully hoping for and encouraging repentance rather than by being unduly hasty or dismissively quarrelsome (2 Thessalonians 3:15; 2 Timothy 2:25–26; Titus 3:10).
26. We contend by showing integrity, dignity, gentleness and courtesy that puts our opponents to shame for its godliness (Titus 2:7–8, 3:2; Philippians 1:28; 1 Peter 3:16).
27. We contend by considering and imitating good examples from former leaders so that we are not led astray by strange and novel teachings (Hebrews 13:7–9).
28. We contend patiently as we look to God to rescue us and punish the wicked (2 Peter 2:9–10; Philippians 1:28; Revelation 2).
29. We contend with meekness and courtesy not contentiousness and ambitious quarrelling, which is unspiritual and demonic (James 3–4).

30. We contend by imitating good rather than evil tactics (3 John; Romans 12:21).

Let us pray:

*God of hosts,
who called Ambrose from the governor's throne
to be a bishop in your Church
and an intrepid champion of your faithful people: mercifully grant that, as
he did not fear to rebuke rulers, so we, with like courage,
may contend for the faith we have received;
through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord,
who is alive and reigns with you,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever.*

Amen.¹

¹ The Collect for 7th December, when we remember Ambrose, Bishop of Milan, Teacher of the Faith, 397. © The Archbishops' Council of the Church of England.

FIGHT VALIANTLY

What does it mean “to contend for the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints”? With so much confusion and argument in today’s church, how are Christians meant to think about and react to false teaching? How can we promote the gospel lovingly in a context of opposition?

In this biblical and practical book, aimed especially at ministers and church councils, Lee Gatiss provides a unique look at the Bible’s teaching on this neglected subject. As well as giving an in-depth survey of the New Testament’s teaching about contending for the gospel and countering heresy, he helps us consider some of the applications of this doctrine to the Church of England today.

“We don’t like contending, but sometimes faithfulness to Christ requires that we must. This book helpfully takes us to the Bible to show us why and how. An excellent resource for individuals, PCC members, and whole churches.”

*Vaughan Roberts, Rector of St Ebbe’s Oxford
and Chairman of the Proclamation Trust*

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