

WHO DOES TITUS 3:10-11 APPLY TO AND HOW ARE WE TO RESPOND TO THEM?

By Greg Lundstedt

The following teaching is an excerpt from an edited email response to someone who believes Titus 3:10 only applies to those propagating false doctrine.

In reading what you wrote, I think it might be helpful for you to gain an understanding of whom we at VBF understand Titus chapter 3 addresses. With this said, I believe your view of Titus chapter 3 could be further informed. Below is a portion from my teaching and then afterward a portion from John MacArthur's teaching concerning this passage.

Titus 3:10-11 states ¹⁰*Reject a factious man after a first and second warning, ¹¹knowing that such a man is perverted and is sinning, being self-condemned.* This passage seems to be quite clear; Paul is speaking to Titus who has been charged with appointing elders in every city on Crete, and is to speak things which are fitting for sound doctrine and to exhort and reprove with all authority. Indeed, he is told what to do with a factious man. This speaks of someone who is divisive. Indeed, just about every modern English translation appears to reveal this is what is the intended meaning.

ESV **Titus 3:10** "As for a person who stirs up division, after warning him once and then twice, have nothing more to do with him,"

NAS **Titus 3:10** "Reject a factious man after a first and second warning,"

NET **Titus 3:10** "Reject a divisive person after one or two warnings."

NIV **Titus 3:10** "Warn a divisive person once, and then warn them a second time. After that, have nothing to do with them."

NKJ **Titus 3:10** "Reject a divisive man after the first and second admonition,"

After reading these different versions, it seems like it is pretty clear what God's Word says. Obviously, the divisive man or factious person can be spotted by their behavior, or there would be no way to follow through with warning them or admonishing them a first and second time, and if they do not respond, have nothing to do with them. This sounds simple, straightforward and uncomplicated. Yet, unfortunately, some people, who I believe have misunderstood this passage, believe it speaks only of those who cause division based on doctrinal error and thus they would not see it as also applying to simply a divisive or factious man.

Now, I believe those who hold to this interpretation do so because there is some, of what appears on the surface, compelling evidence. Yet, I believe as we examine this passage closely, we will recognize this is not the case. In the narrowest sense, there are some who would say the term "factious man" is what is commonly called a "heretic." The reason they would do so is because the Greek word translated "factious" or "divisive" is the word *heretikos*. This word sounds familiar, doesn't it? Indeed, those who brought forth the King James Version translated this word "heretic." So then, this has led some to believe that the factious man spoken of in Titus chapter 3:10 can only be one who is causing division through doctrinal error. Although this argument sounds plausible on the surface, I believe when one looks more closely and rightly divides the Word of God in its context, they will find this cannot, and indeed is not, the only definition intended.

To understand things rightly, we need to be careful not to err in our Greek word studies and our exegesis. Just because a word in English has a connotation does not mean that the same connotation applies to the Greek word from which it was derived.

We understand the meaning of words comes not only from the word alone, but from the context the word is given. When I say the word "trunk," it has absolutely no meaning apart from its context, yet when it is observed in its context we can understand what it means.

Because this word *heretikos* was basically not translated into our early English language Bible versions, but transliterated i.e. “heretic,” a common error for us would be to apply our English understanding and import it into the meaning of the Greek word. It would be wrong to do so in this case.

The word *heretikos* is derived from *haireo*, which means to take or take to oneself or choose. In its common usage in language, it came to mean, in a broad and common sense, someone who was contentious or divisive. Within that, it would certainly apply to those who were contentious or divisive doctrinally, in a more narrow sense. Certainly someone who holds to unsound, un-biblical teaching or doctrine and thus creates division or contention, is obviously *heretikos*, yet one must understand this is not the only semantic sphere in which the word is used.

As I stated previously, the word is not limited to its narrow definition alone, and context determines the meaning of words.

Also, as I shared earlier, it is important to note virtually every modern translation, apart from what we see in the King James (who also made the same error simply transliterating deacon and baptize and as they do with heretic in Titus 3:10), does not translate *heretikos* as “heretic,” but as “factious” or “divisive.” The word in its narrow sense can certainly speak of a factious or divisive men doctrinally speaking, but in a wider sense, if one is honest, one must acknowledge it does allow for a more broad and basic understanding of division or factiousness apart from doctrinal error.

Indeed, looking at Titus 3:10, it would be erroneous to import the idea that Paul was speaking of a doctrinal heretic because of the way Paul, Peter and other inspired writers deal with those whom we would call heretics. Unlike Titus chapter 3, there are many other passages of Scripture where we see there are no warnings or admonishments to encourage those who propagate doctrinal or heretical error to repent.

For instance, in 2 John, there is no warning and allowance for the doctrinal bad guys, but instead believers are warned not even to give them a greeting (as one would to a true believer) or receive them into their house (most likely speaking of house churches), lest they share their sins.

Watch yourselves, that you might not lose what we have accomplished, but that you may receive a full reward. ⁹Anyone who goes too far and does not abide in the teaching of Christ, does not have God; the one who abides in the teaching, he has both the Father and the Son. ¹⁰If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not receive him into your house, and do not give him a greeting; ¹¹for the one who gives him a greeting participates in his evil deeds. (2 John 1:8-11)

A good reading of Jude and second Peter gives no leeway for warning false teachers or for heretics to be warned so as to repent. Indeed, in contrast, we are warned about them so that we may stay away from them and be encouraged, that even though they are causing damage, their eternal punishment is sure. So then, we know Titus chapter 3:10-11 cannot be speaking of a one who is a heretic propagating heresy. We would not admonish a Jehovah’s Witness who was causing division twice before putting them out. We would never let them in, and if they came in, we would put them out immediately.

Yet with that said, Titus chapter 3 could certainly, within the context and range of the word, include those with doctrinal error who are causing divisions, but not outright divisively propagating outright heresy.

What then does one say to those who say that the factious man speaks of division in the context of doctrinal error alone, because of the verses that precede it? I would say one needs to study those verses carefully. Indeed, on the surface this seems possible; however, after a closer examination of the flow of thought, one needs to be careful when making this assumption. Let me explain why. First of all, there is a very clear contrast the apostle Paul is making between verses eight and nine, and then it appears he begins to give another command, which is not connected in any way grammatically. If we look at the context, Paul is finishing up with some last exhortations. In verse eight, Paul has exhorted Titus to speak confidently so that believers will engage in deeds which are good and profitable. Then in contrast,

signified by the word “but” in verse nine, Paul says, “But shun foolish controversies and genealogies and strife and disputes about the Law; for they are unprofitable and worthless.” Titus is commanded to do what is good and profitable, and in contrast is commanded not to do what is unprofitable and worthless. These two verses are unit of thought. Then at this point, Paul moves into another command that does not seem to be connected by any type of conjunction or explanation. Titus 3:10-11 “Reject a factious man after a first and second warning, ¹¹knowing that such a man is perverted and is sinning, being self-condemned.” Although these verses are close and are related, it would be erroneous to say that verse 10 definitely speaks of someone who is doctrinally in error, simply because of the previous verses.

An honest interpreter must acknowledge that *heretikos* in the very basic sense, in this context, means division or factiousness, which certainly does include the idea of division through doctrine, yet is not semantically limited to that. Obviously, people who cause division will be doing it in opposition to the truth, and their behavior will not be in accord with sound doctrine. In fact, their behavior is opposed to it.

So then, there is no doubt Titus chapter 3:10-11 includes those who are doctrinally factious and divisive. Yet, the text does not limit it to these alone. There are certainly those who are factious by their behavior and thus they are creating division with those who are following sound doctrine. It is these also, who, after a first and second warning, we are to have nothing to do with. We are to reject them. Why? Because they are dangerous and God says we are to do so.

At this point, I also want to share an excerpt from John MacArthur’s sermon in italics from Titus 3:9-15 preached 8-22-1993, message 56-26. You will find that although there are some slight differences of opinion, he clearly acknowledges that the factious is not limited to doctrinal, but certainly includes behavioral.

“So, the last word then from Paul on false teachers is shun. Secondly, on factious people...what’s the last word? Verses 10 and 11, “Reject a factious man after a first and second warning knowing that such a man is perverted and is sinning, being self-condemned.” Now this certainly could refer to those who teach unsound doctrine because they would be factious, that is divisive. They would separate. They would be a problem in the church. They would be a sectarian influence. But really it’s beyond that. It goes beyond those who would engage in some wrong doctrine, those who would split the church over a doctrinal issue, it doesn’t confine itself to that, it’s anybody who tends to divide, to fracture the fellowship, to tear the seamless robe, as it were, of the garment of the unity of the church. The church, as you well know, has always struggled against false doctrine and always struggled to maintain unity. It will always be assaulted by people propagating lies and it will always be assaulted by people who try to divide it.

Truth in unity is the stock and trade of the church’s evangelism. Sound doctrine and love expressed is what is our message. What makes our sound doctrine believable is the integrity of our unity as Jesus made so very clear in the time He spoke to His disciples in John 13 and said, “By this will all men know that you’re My disciples if you have love one for another.” So the church has not only always struggled against error, it has struggled against discord, division. You remember Paul wrote 1 Corinthians and the first several chapters clear into chapter 4 are all about trying to bring to that church the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. After all, there is one God, there is one Lord, one faith, one baptism...we, Jesus prayed, would be one and we are in essence. We’ve all been baptized in to one body through the agency of the Holy Spirit, have all been made to drink of the same Spirit, there is a spiritual unity but there needs to be a real and visible one as well. We are called sacrificially to love each other.

In that 1 Corinthian epistle, chapter 1, I think Paul sums it up in verses 10 and following, “ I exhort you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ that you all agree and there be no division among you but you be made complete in the same mind and in the same judgment. I have been informed, concerning you, my brethren, by Chloe’s people that there are quarrels among you. Has Christ been divided?”

It was that very desire for unity that prompted him to write to the Philippians, only conduct yourselves, chapter 1 verse 27, in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or remain absent I may hear of you that you are striving together, standing firm in one spirit for the faith of the gospel. The unity of the church, absolutely crucial.

And that is that to which Paul addresses his attention in this second category. There are some people in the life of the church who are factious. They disrupt. They bring discord. They're divisive. Any of us at any point could do that if we're in sin. The term here for a factious man is hairetikos from which eventually our English transliteration heretic came. The term heretic to us means an apostate, someone who teaches something other than sound doctrine, someone who rejects the truth. We usually think of it in a doctrinal sense. And by the second century hairetikos had come to mean a heretic, or an apostate. But at this time those who study the Greek language tell us that the word really did not have that kind of connotation. It came from the Greek verb hairetomi(?) which simply means to choose, or to prefer...to take for oneself.

It could refer to the particular group that a person chose to belong to. It wouldn't necessarily have been a bad one. For example, it is used throughout the book of Acts and translated the sect of the Pharisees. It is even used in the book of Acts with reference to the sect called Christianity. It simply means a group, a choice. But we start to see its bad connotation, for example, in [Galatians 5:20](#) where it is translated factions and it is shown as one of the expressions of the flesh, the unregenerate wicked fallen flesh.

Summing it up, it had the idea of someone who makes a resolute choice. It then started to mean someone whose choice is obstinate and against the truth. It is used here to mean one who had chosen an idea, one who had chosen a teaching, a doctrine, a viewpoint, a perspective, a course of behavior that was not acceptable to the church. It was not acceptable to the Word of God or it was not acceptable to the mind of the Spirit as revealed through the leadership. Literally, one who chooses for himself, he will not become a part of the consensus. He will not submit to the Word. He will not submit to the leadership. He will not become a part of that which is the mind of the Spirit revealed through the elders.

And later, as I said, by the second century it comes all the way to meaning a heretic and an apostate. But here we have someone who has chosen some unbiblical, some unacceptable way and he's gathering adherents and he's causing strife and division and factions in the church and will not move in to the area where truth resides and the testimony of the Spirit leads.

Lenski, the commentator, writes, "This person chooses for himself what the church by choosing the Scripture must repudiate and disdain." So he stands against the truth and against the leadership of the church and against the will of the Spirit. He may be holding some novel interpretation, some novel myth, some genealogical extrapolation or mystical interpretation. He may be holding some ignorant interpretation of Scripture. He may be also holding some course of action, some personal whim, some personal preference about behavior or conduct or whatever. The issue is he's divisive.

What do we do? The verb says reject. Reject, that's the last word. Have nothing to do with them. Reject. Don't have anything to do with them." John MacArthur

So then, as I stated above, there is no doubt Titus chapter 3:10-11 includes those who are doctrinally factious and divisive. Yet the text does not limit it to these alone. There are certainly those who are factious by their behavior and thus they are creating division with those who are following sound doctrine. It is these also who, after a first and second warning, we are to have nothing to do with. We are to reject them. Why? Because they are dangerous and God says we are to do so.

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