

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.

Titus 3:10-11 states ¹⁰*Reject a factious man after a first and second warning,* ¹¹*knowing 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.

Titus 3:10-11 states “*Reject a factious man after a first and second warning, ¹¹knowing that such a man is perverted and is sinning, being self-condemned.*”