

Who Are the Heretics?

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A man that is an heretick after the first and second admonition reject; ¹¹ Knowing that he that is such is subverted, and sinneth, being condemned of himself. (Titus 3:10-11, KJV)

Warn a divisive person once, and then warn him a second time. After that, have nothing to do with him. ¹¹ You may be sure that such a man is warped and sinful; he is self-condemned. (Titus 3:10-11, NIV)

The word *heretic* sends chills up-and-down the spine. We cannot hear the word *heretic* without the negative overtone of someone who is not sound in the faith. Hundreds of people were executed by the Catholic Church as well as the Church of England for differences in their responses to the various ecclesiastical institutions under the charge of heresy.¹ Today, this word is frequently employed by many well-meaning Christians to castigate anyone who dares to differ with the status quo of their particular brand of orthodoxy. This study seeks to set forth the biblical concept of a “heretic.” This study reveals that a biblical heretic is a factious person (αἱρετικὸν ἄνθρωπον, *hairetikon anthrōpon*, “a factious man/person”), not necessarily one who has misunderstood some Scripture. Too many Christians are intoxicated by their own traditions to see clearly the teachings of God. It is in this vein that Eden and Cedar Paul seek to capture the negative overtones in the word *heretics* as they relate Castellio’s controversy with Calvin:

Castellio developed his thesis with dispassionate logic, lucidly and irrefutably. The question at issue was whether heretics should be persecuted and punished with death for what was a purely intellectual offence. But before discussing this, Castellio [1515-1563] inquires: “What do we really mean by the term heretic? Whom are we entitled to call a heretic, without being unjust?” Castellio’s answer runs: “I do not believe that all those who are termed heretics are really heretics. . . . The appellation has today become so abusive, so terrifying, carries with it such an atmosphere of opprobrium [something that brings disgrace], that whenever a man wishes to rid himself of a private enemy, he finds that the most convenient way is to accuse this foe of heresy. As soon as others hear the dreaded name, they are filled with such overwhelming fear that they stop their ears, and blindly assail not only the alleged heretic, but also those who venture to say a word in his favor.”²

¹For a detailed account of the atrocities committed against Christians within the Church of England and the Catholic Church, see Dallas Burdette, “Where the Scriptures Speak,” in Dallas Burdette, *From Legalism to Freedom: A Spiritual Narrative of Liberation* (Longwood, FL: Xulon Press, 2008), 87-149

²Stefan Zweig, *The Right to Heresy: Castellio against Calvin*, translated by Eden and Cedar Paul (New York: The Viking Press, 1936), 153-154. Sebastian Castellio died on December 29, 1563 before the claws of his

Titus 3:10 is frequently cited by many well-meaning Christians to justify separation from other Christians over controversial interpretations of certain Scriptures. This passage is wrenched from its context to condone the charge of *heresy* against anyone who departs from the so-called watchword of the church fathers. The word *heresy* is frequently associated with wrong beliefs. For instance, if we believe that it is appropriate to praise God with instrumental music, then we are guilty of heresy, at least to the acappella fellowship. If we maintain that individual communion cups for the communion are correct, then the one-cup Christians label the cups users as *heretics*. Why? Because they supposedly are guilty of “false doctrine.” This list of violations among the various segments within the Churches of Christ is almost *ad infinitum* (without end).

Depending on which group of saints we meet with, we discover an infringement on their so-called “new law” about public worship is sufficient to receive the label of “heretic.” In order for us to be labeled as heretics, we must violate or change the traditional interpretation, that is to say, our interpretation that contradicts the dictates of the group to which we are attached. It is not uncommon for Christians to fail to consult the historical circumstances surrounding the books of the Bible under consideration. Many approach the Word of God that is colored by their environment. They borrow hand-me-down traditions received from their predecessors.

Unfortunately, many of these men and women made use of their sources to convey their particular brand of Christianity. Without thinking, they read into the texts the views that they liked best. Just a perusal of many religious journals reveals that forced and artificial methods of interpretation are piled upon the text. In other words, many believers assign meanings to words that do not belong. Many Christian communities have been transformed into totalitarianism without realizing what has happened to them. We must retrace our steps to find out where we went off the track. **As we seek to eliminate all the underbrush that hides the true meaning of Titus 3:10, we must abandon our fertile imaginations as to what we think the text means by what it says.** The word that creates confusion within the Christian community is the word *heretic*.

The words *heresy* (αἵρεσις *haireisis*) and *heretic* (αἵρετικός *hairetikos*) are two words that are frequently applied to those who maintain unorthodox teaching, that is to say, teachings not in line with the status quo of certain fellowships. Christians are frequently called *heretics*

enemies could execute him. His death (age 48) put an end to the campaign of calumny (Ibid., 218). Eden and Cedar write, 219:

There was not a fragment of silverware left in the house. His friends had to provide funeral expenses, pay his trifling debts, and take charge of his children. As if in recompense for the shamefulness of the accusation of heresy, Sebastian Castellio’s interment was a moral triumph. Those who had timidly drawn away from him after the charge of heresy had been brought were now eager to show how much they loved and honored him. The funeral train was followed by all the members of the university, the coffin being borne to the cathedral on the shoulders of students, and interred there in the crypt. At their own cost, three hundred of his pupils provided a tombstone on which were chiseled the words: “To our renowned teacher, in gratitude for his extensive knowledge and in commemoration of the purity of his life.”

and charged with *heresy* when they do not subscribe to the tenets of a particular party. Even though we may be true to the Gospel (Jesus as God’s way of salvation), still, in spite of our adherence to the Good News of God’s redemption “in” and “through” Christ, unless we hold to the “odd” interpretations of a specific fellowship, then we are still castigated as *heretics*. We may believe in God, we may believe in the Deity of Jesus, we may believe in the Holy Spirit, we may believe in the inspiration of the Holy Scriptures, and we may believe that God’s Word is applicable to every area of our lives, still it is not uncommon for some believers to refer to other believers as *heretics* or charge them with *heresy* when their beliefs differ from the status quo of an exacting faction.

THOMAS B. WARREN

I, in my early ministry, applied Titus 3:10 to any fellowship of believers that refused to interpret the Scriptures in harmony with the religious leaders of the one-cup and non-Sunday school fellowship, but this Scripture is not the property of anyone group of God’s people. This Scripture is cited by many fellowships to justify detachment from others when Scripture interpretation departs from the norm of a particular group. Today, for one to express a view that fails to agree with another point of view as advanced by some demanding body of believers, this deviation, or variation, is sufficient to deserve the epithet of *heresy*. Since I came out of the background of Churches of Christ, I can speak from first-hand knowledge of this movement—a movement that started out as a unity movement to unite Christians in all the various denominations.

Today, there are approximately twenty-five or more divisions within the Churches of Christ. Each splinter group claims this passage as its own. For instance, the late Thomas B. Warren’s (1920-2000) quotation of this passage is a classic example of the misuse of Titus 3:10 to justify departure from the so-called erring Christian.³ According to Warren’s view, if one espouses what Warren considers to be “false doctrine,” then this person is a *heretic*:

To be a heretic is to be an espouser and follower of false doctrine. The man who persists in the promulgation of false doctrine—even in the face of efforts to persuade him to repent—must be rejected (refused). Thus, we conclude from the passage: (2) It is possible to be a heretic; (b) Such

³Even though Thomas B. Warren (1920-2000) has gone on to be with the Lord, nevertheless his writings still remain. Since he is still respected as a scholar, it is necessary to scrutinize his writings to see if he followed the context in his application of certain passages in seeking to give validity to his actions of separation from other believers who could not concur with him in his interpretation of many Scriptures. He, like all of us, brings a certain amount of baggage to the Scriptures, which is inevitable. Still, we have to be conscious of our own presuppositions. My remarks about his essay have nothing to do with my respect for this man whose life was dedicated to Jesus Christ. In my opinion, he mistakenly misapplied certain Scriptures to uphold his exclusivist concept of fellowship. I, too, did this for many years. So, I can sympathize with his struggles in wanting to be true to the Word of God. My analysis of his application of Titus 3:10 is not to condemn, but rather to help bring about a better understanding of the Holy Scriptures in order that the unity for which Jesus prayed might become a reality among His people, even if my comments about his application of Titus 3:10 seem rather blunt at times.

people should be admonished by faithful brethren; (c) When a heretic will not repent, he must be rejected (refused, withdrawn from) by faithful brethren.⁴

Warren speaks of “faithful brethren.” This expression, to Warren, meant conformity to the dictates of his particular brand of Christianity. We must not question his sincerity in his application of Titus 3:10, but his subjective interpretation and dogmatic approach to this passage undermines and denies the very Scriptures he wanted to uphold. In fact, this Scripture, as cited by many godly men and women, would be more applicable to them than to someone else who has misinterpreted some passage of Scripture. In other words, **the word heretic has to do with an attitude of the heart more than doctrinal correctness of the mind**. To the unsuspecting, there appears to be truth to his explanation. For example, we can agree that if one is a *heretic*, then he or she must be refused. These individuals—men or women—must be admonished by other Christians to desist in their behavior of factiousness. And, finally, this one must be shunned if he or she continues in this kind of unethical behavior that is disruptive to the unity of the Spirit. Paul also dealt with this kind of behavior in Romans 16:17.⁵

We can also grant this analysis that one who is a biblical heretic must be shunned if they continue in the behavior that Paul addresses, but, on the other hand, we cannot see eye-to-eye with Warren when he says, “To be a heretic is to be an espouser and follower of false doctrine.” He is employing a definition that is anachronistic (existing or happening outside its historical order). The implications that he draws from Titus 3:10 are not necessarily true.

His essay is based on a series of unverifiable arguments, which in turn function as assumptions, that is, to the effect that the Apostle Paul had Warren’s philosophy in mind when he wrote to Titus. I have not hesitated to reject ancient doctrines when new evidence demonstrates that the traditional interpretation is untenable. I, too, was taught many interpretations by a godly and sincere man of God, but, at the same time, he failed to look at the context in many of his citations from Holy Scripture. Unconsciously, he wrenched Scriptures out of context through piece-meal interpretation. It is time for us to reexamine old texts through new eyes.

It appears, so it seems to me, that Warren’s rationalization is similar in nature to the position maintained by Catholic and Anglican Churches during the 14th through the 18th centuries as well as the Spanish Inquisition. The believers in these movements inflicted torture beyond belief over the misunderstanding of the words heresy and *heretic*. Twenty-first century Christians cannot burn individuals at the stake or drown them in rivers, but, nevertheless, they can still infuse stark terror in the hearts of many with the word *excommunicate*. The explanation that Warren assigns to Titus 3:10 is the description that is generally doled out to the words *heresy* and *heretic*. The *Webster’s University Dictionary* defines these two words as:

Heresy. 1a. An opinion or doctrine in conflict with established religious beliefs, esp. dissension from or denial of Roman Catholic dogma by a professed believer or baptized church member. **b.**

⁴Thomas B. Warren, “We Must Honor God’s Law of Exclusion” (Editorial), *The Spiritual Sword* 12, no. 4 (July 1981): 22. Since the writing of this essay, Warren has crossed the great gulf to be with the Lord.

⁵For a more detailed study of Romans 16:17, see Chapter 14 (“Watch Out for Those Who Cause Divisions”) in this book, pp. 273-304.

Adherence to such dissenting opinions or doctrine. **2a.** An unorthodox or controversial opinion or doctrine, as in philosophy, science, or politics. **b.** Adherence to such unorthodox or controversial opinion.⁶

Heretic. 1. One who hold or advocates controversial opinions, esp. one who publicly opposes the officially accepted dogma of the Roman Catholic Church.⁷

It is not uncommon for Christians within the various splinter groups of the Churches of Christ to refuse fellowship with other believers when they decline to adhere to an opinion that is officially accepted as dogma with a particular group. The reason for the negative response is based upon the label *heretic*, which he or she must be accused of in order to preserve the prevailing attitude of the defenders of the faith. Thus, the term *heretic* is indiscriminately associated with the horrible word *heresy*, which, as stated above, brings to mind the *heresy* trials of the Spanish Inquisition. John R. W. Stott (1921-2011), evangelical Anglican, preacher and teacher of Scripture, is quite correct in observing that the traditional interpretation is anachronistic:

Warn a *divisive* person, Paul writes. The Greek word is *hairitikos*, which the AV and (surprisingly NEB translate “heretic”. But his is an anachronism, for the word had not yet assumed this meaning. *Hairesis* means a sect, party or school of thought, and is applied in the Acts to Sadducees, Pharisees and Christians. *Hairitikos*, however, meant somebody who is ‘factious’ (RSV), ‘contentious’ (REB) or ‘divisive’ (NIV).⁸

ALLEN BAILEY

Another sincere writer and preacher, Allen Bailey (second cousin of mine), of the one-cup and non-Sunday school persuasion, cites this verse as well as many other passages in his essay against so-called false teachers. Just a cursory glance at his many citations reveals that he would consider Thomas B. Warren a *heretic*, that is, one guilty of *heresy*.⁹ We almost stand in

⁶Webster’s *II New Riverside University Dictionary*, 1984 ed., s. v. “heresy.”

⁷Ibid., s.v. “heretic.”

⁸John R. W. Stott, *The Message of 1 Timothy & Titus*, The Bible Speaks Today (Downers Grove, Illinois: Inter-Varsity Press, 1996), 210.

⁹Allen Bailey, “Beware of False Teachers,” *Preachers’ Study Notes: 1994 Preachers’ Study* (Buffalo, Missouri: Christian’s Expositor Publications, 1996), 69-82. As stated above concerning Thomas B. Warren and Allen Bailey, both men wish to be true to the Word of God. Having said this, Bailey received his interpretation of Titus 3:10 from two men—E.H. Miller (1909-1989) his grandfather and my uncle) and his father and my first cousin (Alton Bailey). Both Alton and I received our training and understanding from E. H. Miller [1909-1989] (my uncle and Alton Bailey’s father-in-law). The three of us—myself, Alton (1932-2014), and Allen—grew up in a fellowship in which grace was not discussed. It is significant that Allen calls attention to this neglect in his childhood and early ministry. Allen Bailey, to express in his own words this poverty of grace in preaching, says,

Brothers, sisters, and friends, please listen. I do have some concerns and sympathy toward the confusion on this problem. By and large we have all been raised with law-law-law and little or no grace taught. I was raised in a congregation [Murphy Ave. Church of Christ, LaGrange, GA.] with three full length gospel meetings every year. I don’t remember preachers preaching the subject of

disbelief as we encounter the many individuals whom he labels as false teachers in his study. The definition that Warren and Bailey assign to these words through their writings does not come from the Bible, but rather from the traditions of men. In this lengthy study by Bailey, he cites twenty-eight Scriptures to give validity to his castigation of men who do not concur with his particular brand of orthodoxy. In this numerous accumulation of Scripture references, he also quotes Titus 3:10.

In his essay, he has a subtitle—False Doctrines of the Twentieth Century—which takes in the “Promise-Keepers Movement,”¹⁰ “Catholic Evangelical Accord,”¹¹ “Calvinism,”¹² “Grace-Faith-Works Issue,”¹³ “Liberal Views on Fellowship,”¹⁴ “The Truth About the Church of Christ—Hugh F. Pyle,”¹⁵ “Televangelists (T. V. Evangelist Pat Robertson (b. 1930) and the 700 club, Oral Roberts (1918-2009), Jim Baker, Jimmy Swaggart, Robert Tilton (b. 1946), etc.),”¹⁶ “Pastor Pet Peters,”¹⁷ “John McArthur,”¹⁸ “J. Vernon McGee (1904-1988),”¹⁹ and on and on he goes. Titus 3:10 is just one of twenty-eight Scriptures he cites to give soundness to his charge of “False Teachers.” He writes: “To this concern, and all others, I sound the alarm—*beware of false teachers!*”²⁰

Under the umbrella of Titus 3:10, he includes those within the Churches of Christ who seek a wider fellowship with other believers; anyone who is willing to cross the dictates of a few self-appointed watchdogs for the orthodoxy of a small segment of God’s people. And furthermore, he brings in those who teach that salvation is by faith in Jesus, not works. We must take for granted, even though Titus 3:10 does not employ the words “false teachers,” that Bailey considers the word *heretic* as synonymous with “false teachers,” which in turn is identified as “false teaching.”

This particular Scripture is cited to condemn Christians, such as the late Warren who used individual communion cups and participated in Sunday school. This philosophy about Titus 3:10 and its application are not new with Bailey. He cut, as it were, his eyeteeth on this passage. I, too, also cut my eyeteeth on this passage. I, as well, misapplied this Scripture for over seventeen years of my ministry. His misunderstanding and my misunderstanding was/is

grace. I worked closely with several congregations in Missouri, and though I attended their meetings for thirteen years, I cannot remember one lesson given on grace. I have been preaching for nineteen years and have just recently began to teach on Grace. We must remember that to preach grace is to preach Jesus Christ for “grace and truth came by Jesus Christ” (Jn. 1:17) [Ibid., 78,79].

¹⁰Ibid., 75.

¹¹Ibid., 77.

¹²Ibid.

¹³Ibid., 78

¹⁴Ibid., 79.

¹⁵Ibid., 80.

¹⁶Ibid.

¹⁷Ibid.

¹⁸Ibid.

¹⁹Ibid.

²⁰Ibid., 81

not rebellion against the teachings of Holy Scripture, but rather, it was/is simply an honest mistake of the heart.

THE HOLY SPIRIT

The Holy Spirit did not employ the traditional meaning generally assigned to this word *heretic*. In the New Testament, the word *heresy* does not suggest truth or error—good or bad. The English word *heresy* is anglicized from the Greek **αἵρεσις**, *haireisis*. E. P. Gould puts it graphically:

“Heresies” is a transliteration, but not a translation, of the Greek word, which has come over into the English with a different meaning from its ordinary Greek, or New Testament, meaning.²¹

The Greek expression **αἵρεσις** (*haireisis*) did not originally denote anything good or bad; but rather, the word simply meant “choice” or “the act of choosing.” The Septuagint (LXX) uses *haireisis* to refer to the gift that one chooses to offer to God (Leviticus 22:18). Also, Moses employs *haireisis* to describe the choice of Simeon and Levi (Genesis 49:5). We quickly observe that in the LXX, the word may relate to choices, which may be good or bad. Both Paul and Peter employ this word as Partyism (1 Corinthians 11:19; Galatians 5:20; 2 Peter 2:1; Titus 3:10).

God condemns this kind of attitude—a stance of divisiveness, or factiousness. Luke also uses this same word but not in a bad sense. For instance, he writes, “Then the high priest and all his associates, who were members of the party (**αἵρεσις** *haireisis*) of the Sadducees, were filled with jealousy” (Acts 5:17). Later, Luke gives a brief overview of Paul’s trial before Felix in which the word *haireisis* is employed. At this trial, Tertullus, a lawyer, brought charges against Paul with the following words: “We have found this man to be a troublemaker, stirring up riots among the Jews all over the world. He is a ringleader of the Nazarene sect (**αἰρέσεως** *haireseōs*)” [24:5].

At a glance, it might appear that the “Nazarene sect” is used in a bad sense, but the derogatory remarks by Tertullus are not against the sect, as such, but against Paul as a “ringleader” of the Nazarene sect. Paul’s response to the accusation is an argument that he is loyal to the Jewish religion:

My accusers did not find me arguing with anyone at the temple, or stirring up a crowd in the synagogues or anywhere else in the city. ¹³And they cannot prove to you the charges they are now making against me. ¹⁴However, I admit that I worship the God of our fathers as a follower of the Way, which they call a sect (**αἵρεσιν** *haireisin*). I believe everything that agrees with the Law and that is written in the Prophets. (24:12-14)

Again, Luke records Paul’s arrival at Rome and his request to meet with the leaders of the Jews. In the course of the conversation, they informed Paul that they had not heard anything

²¹E. P. Gould, *First Corinthians*, in *An American Commentary on the New Testament*, vol., 5 ed., Alvah Hovey, Reprint Edition, nd (Philadelphia: The American Baptist Publication, 1887), 97.

bad about him. The leaders then informed Paul that they wanted to know his views concerning the sect (**αἵρέσεως** *haireisin*) that so many were talking against (28:17-22). Paul considered himself a loyal and orthodox Jew until his dying day. Yes, Christians today are members of the "Nazarene sect," but, at the same time, God condemns sects within THE SECT.

The Scriptures give no indication that the word *haireisis* has anything to do with opinions or doctrines, whether true or false. We can be guilty of *haireisis* even with the truth (see Romans 16:17). The word simply means sect or party, whether good or bad, or indifferent. Within Judaism, there were several sects, but with Christianity there are parts but not parties (see 1 Corinthians 3:1-23). Within the Christian community, every believer is to make every effort to protect the "unity of the Spirit." Listen to Paul as he makes his plea for harmony within the body of Christ:

As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. ²Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. ³Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. ⁴There is one body and one Spirit— just as you were called to one hope when you were called—⁵one Lord, one faith, one baptism; ⁶one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all. ⁷But to each one of us grace has been given as Christ apportioned it. (Ephesians 4:1-7)

Every sect within the Nazarene sect must surrender its opinions as a bond of union. If we surrender our opinions, what remains to unite Christians? The answer is found in the Gospel facts alone. Paul builds his case for maintaining the unity of the Spirit upon seven "ones" (4:1-7). These facts alone can unite Christians. It goes, almost with saying, that "the faith" is public property, but, on the other hand, opinions are private property. The Scriptures declare that there is "one faith" (Jesus is the object of this one faith), but nowhere does it state there is "one opinion." Alexander Campbell (1788-1866), early leader in the Second Great Awakening of the religious movement that has been referred to as the Restoration Movement within the Churches of Christ, captures the very essence of Paul's admonition to Titus with the following succinct words:

I will now show how they cannot make a sect of us. We will acknowledge all as Christians who acknowledge the gospel facts, and obey Jesus Christ. . . . If he will dogmatize and become a factionist, we reject him—not because of his opinions, but because of his attempting to make a faction, or to lord it over God's heritage.²²

THE HERETIC AND THE FALSE TEACHER

The word *heretic* (**αἵρετικός**, *hairetikos*) appears but once in the New Testament (Titus 3:10). The NIV translates this verse: "Warn a divisive person (**αἵρετικόν ἄνθρωπον**, *hairetikon anthrōpon*) once, and then warn him a second time. After that, have nothing to do with him."

²²Alexander Campbell, *Christianity Restored* (Rosemead, California: Old Paths Book Club, 1959), 122, 123.

The NASB translates this verse as: “Reject a factious man after a first and second warning”²³ The NCV renders this passage: “After a first and second warning, avoid someone who causes arguments.”²⁴ This person of whom Paul speaks is an individual who is the head of a faction. He or she is the promoter of a sect or party within the body of Christ, which is one. Paul is saying that the *heretic* is one who has decided that he or she is right and everyone else is wrong to the point of creating division over his or her opinion or opinions. The following extract from William Barclay (1907-1978), Church of Scotland minister and Professor of Divinity and Biblical Criticism at the University of Glasgow, may help to explain the original meaning of the word *heretic*:

The English word heresy is to all intents and purposes a transliteration of the Greek word *Hairesis*. In English, heresy is a word with a distinctively bad meaning; it denotes a belief which is contrary to orthodoxy and to true doctrine. But in Greek *Hairesis* is not necessarily a bad word for it means either an act of choosing or a choice.... It is the breaking up of the unity of the Church into cliques who shut their circle to all but their own number.... There is all the difference in the world between believing that we are right and believing that everyone else is wrong. Unshakable conviction is a Christian virtue; unyielding intolerance is a sin.²⁵

We may be correct in our interpretation of the Scriptures and still be a *heretic* in the biblical sense of the word. The Christians at Rome—whether weak or strong—were encouraged to allow for discrepancies of opinions concerning the eating of meats and the keeping of certain days. He went right to the very heart of the spirit of intolerance in seeking to maintain the unity created by the Holy Spirit. For instance, Paul began his analysis of diversity existing among the members of the Christians at Rome with a startling statement: “Accept him whose faith is weak, without passing judgment on disputable matters” (Romans 14:1). Then Paul succinctly asked: “Who are you to judge someone else’s servant? To his own master he stands or falls. And he will stand, for the Lord is able to make him stand” (14:4). Following his discussion of variations within the body of believers at Rome, he issues the following orders: “Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God” (15:7). In other words, Christ had accepted all of them with imperfection in their lives and in their knowledge.

Thus, Paul is saying that they should accept one another in the same fashion that Christ accepts them—“warts and all.” Even though some were mistaken in their knowledge, still they were not accused of *heresy*. If on the other hand, the “knowing ones” persisted in destroying the unity of the body of Christ in order to enforce unity-in-conformity, then Paul would have called them *heretics*. Paul, in concluding this epistle (Romans), issues a warning toward those who were not willing to make allowances for irregularity in discernment of God’s Word: “I urge you, brothers, to watch out for those who cause divisions and put obstacles in your way that are contrary to the teaching you have learned. Keep away from them” (16:17).

²³*The New American Standard Bible, 1995 Update*, (La Habra, California: The Lockman Foundation) 1996.

²⁴*The New Century Version*, (Dallas, Texas: Word Publishing) 1987, 1988, 1991.

²⁵William Barclay, *Flesh and Spirit* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1962), 58, 59, 60.

What had they learned? We should reread Chapters 14 and 15 of the Book of Romans to understand what they had learned. These two chapters deal with the spirit of toleration in spite of differences in opinions. For those not willing to exercise patience with those who understood things differently, Paul says that one should keep an eye on those who insist that it is my way or no way. This mental mindset is what Paul confronts in his letter to Titus. The context of Titus 3 reveals that Paul is dealing with individuals who insist that it is my way or no way at all.

Paul, too, had to confront the same mental attitude in Corinth concerning imperfection in understanding the true nature of the Godhead. Paul writes six chapters (8-13) dealing with dissimilarity within the congregation. He begins Chapter 8 with words that may possibly have been upon the lips of some of the believers: “Now about food sacrificed to idols: **We know that we all possess knowledge**” (1 Corinthians 8:1). Once more, William Barclay (1907-1978) uses the following pregnant words in his comments on this passage:

Nothing ought to be judged solely from the point of view of knowledge; everything ought to be judged from the point of view of love. The argument of the advanced Corinthians was that they knew better than to regard an idol as anything; their knowledge had taken them far past that. There is always a certain danger in knowledge. It tends to make a man arrogant and feel superior and look down unsympathetically on the man who is not as far advanced as himself. Knowledge which does that is not true knowledge. But the consciousness of intellectual superiority is a dangerous thing. Our conduct should always be guided not by the thought of our own superior knowledge, but by sympathetic and considerate love for our fellow man. And it may well be that for his sake we must refrain from doing and saying certain otherwise legitimate things.²⁶

Paul calls attention to the arrogance of so-called intellectual superiority by a few: “Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up. ² **The man who thinks he knows something does not yet know as he ought to know** (8:1b-2). How does God react toward the man or woman who loves Him, but still does not get the picture fully? Is God like a motorcycle cop riding around waiting for the least infraction of the law in order to zap him or her? How should we react to imperfection in knowledge? How many Christians comprehend the teachings of God as they ought? Paul says that the person who thinks he or she has a handle on everything is just barking up the wrong tree.

Again, how does God feel about someone who is lacking in “picture perfect” information? Are there any mitigating circumstances in which God makes allowances? Listen to Paul as he nips the arguments of the “knowing ones” in the bud: “But the man who loves God is known by God” (8:3). This is one of the greatest statements in all of Scripture. **If a man loves God**, says Paul, **God knows this man**. This statement goes against the grain of the present day philosophy of “unity-in-conformity.” Paul advances the notion of “unity-in-diversity” in First Corinthians, Romans, and Titus.

Paul correctly says through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, “There is but one God, the Father, from whom all things came and for whom we live; and there is but one Lord, Jesus

²⁶William Barclay, *The Letters to the Corinthians*, The Daily Study Bible Series, Revised Edition (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1975), 76.

Christ, through whom all things came and through whom we live” (8:6). Yes, there is “one God” and “one Lord.” But did everyone appreciate this truth? Listen to Paul once more: “But not everyone knows this” (8:7). Were these folks still Christians and in fellowship with God and Christ? Again, Paul gives the proper response as to how Christians should treat one another over this controversial issue that threatens to divide the unity of the Spirit:

Be careful, however, that the exercise of your freedom does not become a stumbling block to the weak. ¹⁰ For if anyone with a weak conscience sees you who have this knowledge eating in an idol’s temple, won’t he be emboldened to eat what has been sacrificed to idols? ¹¹ So this weak brother, for whom Christ died, is destroyed by your knowledge. (8:9-11)

Earlier, in this chapter, attention was called to six chapters in First Corinthians in which Paul dealt with diversity within the Corinthian congregation. After developing his thoughts, we observe the master builder reaching the climax of his literary masterpiece of unity within the body of Christ. He does this in the thirteenth chapter of 1 Corinthians. This chapter is generally disconnected and isolated from its context of concreteness and interpreted with abstraction—nothing to really sink the teeth into. How does Paul deal with this imperfection in knowledge? The answer is love. The same response that he set forth in Chapter 8: “The man who thinks he knows something does not yet know as he ought to know. ³ **But the man who loves God is known by God**” (vv. 2-3). Yet again, one should observe verse two again: “The man who thinks he knows something **does not yet know as he ought to know.**” Now, pay attention to Paul as he concludes his analysis of discrepancies within the fellowship:

Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known. ¹³ And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love. (13:12-13)

How do we deal faithfully with this subject of “Who Are the Heretics?” without repeating the same themes time and again? Repetition is sometimes necessary in order to cause individuals to reread the text anew. Again, we should reexamine old texts through new eyes. The task of discarding the underbrush of traditions heaped upon Titus 3:10 is a monumental undertaking. We should remember that repetition is a good teacher. In the early 70s, my Greek and Hebrew professor (Lawrence Barclay) taught that there are three laws to learning: (1) repetition, (2) repetition, and (3) repetition.

The biblical *heretic* is the man or woman who has a sectarian spirit. Many devout and sincere Christians within the Churches of Christ as well as other denominational bodies have failed to consider the context of Titus 3:10 and the “common sense” interpretation of the real world, not in the fantasy world. Even though we may argue that “common sense” is not a good guide in the interpretation of Scripture, still, if something goes against the grain (“common sense”), then we ought to reexamine our own presuppositions to see if they are in harmony with the Word of God. If something does not have a “ring of truth,” we should at least go back to the drawing board to reexamine our preconceived notions.

An illustration of “common sense interpretation” is found in the writings of Carl Ketcherside (1908-1989), preacher and author: “Men can be mistaken without being malicious.

They can fail to understand without falling away from Jesus.”²⁷ For a second time, no one has expressed the danger of the party spirit with its desire to hold back growth in knowledge better than Ketcherside: “Every faction seeks to freeze knowledge at an arbitrary partisan level, and every such faction does it by skimming off the brains.”²⁸ One more example of “common sense interpretation” from Ketcherside should suffice to nail the coffin shut on those who wish to make conformity the criterion by which fellowship is extended to believers:

Those who were in Christ in the days of the apostles were in error on many points. They were mistaken about a lot of things but they were not charged with “preaching another gospel.” Freedom from error is not a condition of salvation else all men would be damned. We are not saved by attainment to a certain degree of knowledge but by faith in Christ Jesus. It is by belief of facts related to him, and not by grasp of abstract truth, that we are justified before God. Certainly it is not by performance of meritorious deeds nor by legalistic conformity. When we postulate a program of justification by knowledge we hang ourselves on the gallows we have constructed to rid ourselves of others, unless we are prepared to make ourselves even more ridiculous by affirming that we know as much as God.²⁹

One of the founders of the fellowship known as the Churches of Christ addresses this issue of various levels of knowledge in trying to correct the sectarian spirit in his own day. The Churches of Christ are notorious for using the word *denomination* to refer to other religious bodies, but, at the same time, they exclude themselves as if they, and they alone, belong to the “true” church, which is not a denomination.³⁰ Alexander Campbell (1788-1866) paints a picture with words that captures “common sense interpretation,” mentioned earlier, in describing the deplorable conditions of disunity within the Christian community. The Christians in his day were just as divided over issues as the Churches of Christ are today. Listen to Campbell’s timely words of warning:

²⁷Carl Ketcherside, “Analysis of Apostasy,” *Mission Messenger* 27, no., 5 (April 1965): 51.

²⁸Carl Ketcherside, “Gospel and Doctrine,” *Mission Messenger* 27, no., 2 (February 1965): 18.

²⁹Carl Ketcherside, “Another Gospel,” *Mission Messenger* 27, no 1 (January 1965): 6-7.

³⁰This statement, no doubt, sends chills up-and-down the spines of many Christians. Yet, one of the founders of the movement known as the Churches of Christ was honest enough to refer to this movement as a denomination. Keep your mind on Campbell as he explains his movement:

Whenever the history of this effort at reformation shall have been faithfully written, it will appear, we think, bright as the sun, that our career has been marked with a spirit of forbearance, moderation, and love of union with an unequivocal desire for preserving the integrity, harmony, and co-operation of all who teach one faith, one Lord, and one immersion. In confirmation of this fact I am happy to add that no Baptist of good character for piety and morality, has ever been, because of a diverse theory or opinion, excluded from our communion or communities.... We, as a **denomination**, are as desirous as ever to unite and co-operate with all Christians on the broad and vital principles of the New and everlasting Covenant [emphasis mine—RDB] (Alexander Campbell, “The Editor’s Response to Mr. Broaddus,” *Millennial Harbinger*, New Series, 4, no. 12 (December 1840): 556.)

Amongst Christians there is now, as there was at the beginning a very great diversity in the knowledge of the Christian institution. There are babes, children, young men, and fathers in Christ now, as well as in the days of the Apostle John. This, from the natural gifts of God, from the diversities of age, education, and circumstances, is unavoidable. And would it not be just as rational and as scriptural to excommunicate one another, because our knowledge is less or greater than any fixed measure, as for differences of opinion or matters of speculation?

Indeed, in most cases where proscription [to denounce or condemn—RDB] and exclusions now occur in this country, the excluded are the most intelligent members of the society; and although no community will accuse a man because he knows more of his Bible than his brethren, and on this account exclude him from their communion; yet this, it is manifest, rather than heresy, (of which, however, for consistency's sake, he must be accused,) is, in truth, the real cause of separation.

If God has bestowed better gifts or better opportunities on one man than another, by which he has attained more knowledge, instead of thanking God for his kindness to the community, they beg God to take him away; and if he will not be so unkind, they will at length put him from among them under the charge of heresy. In most instances the greatest error of which a brother can be guilty, is to study his Bible more than his companions—or, at least, to surpass them in his knowledge of the mystery of Christ.³¹

The context of Titus 3:10 does not teach that one who fails to subscribe to certain rules and regulations that other Christians seek to impose upon him or her are guilty of *heresy*. We are not *heretics* simply because we cannot conscientiously concur with the orthodox position of a particular party. We can be mistaken without being rebellious. We can fail to understand without falling away from Jesus. Our position on the use of individual containers to distribute the fruit of the vine in the Lord's Supper, Bible classes for teaching the Word of God to different age groups, chartered homes in which to rear and care for orphans, belief in pre-millennialism, teaching that the Book of Revelation was written before June AD 68, praising God with instruments of music, and so on, does not, in and of itself, constitute *heresy* or the epithet *heretic*.³²

No one who is honestly mistaken about some matters of scriptural interpretation is a *heretic*. For one to be a *heretic*, one must make a test of fellowship out of his or her opinions and then attempt to establish a party to promote or protect that view. The *heretic* is one who brands and stigmatizes humble seekers after truth whose character is above reproach and whose only crime is that they cannot be of the same mindset in every point of view or opinion held by those who have assumed the role of infallible interpreters. This mindset of intolerance for various viewpoints is the subject matter that Paul warns against in his Epistles—First Corinthians, Romans, and Titus.

³¹ Alexander Campbell, "To Mr. William Jones, of London, Letter IV," *Millennial Harbinger* 6, no. 3 (March 1835): 112.

³²I recommend the following essays on this subject as two of the most informative articles written on this subject: Carl Ketcherside, "What Is Heresy," *Mission Messenger* 25, no., 3 (March 1963): 39-44; Leroy Garrett, "Who Is A Heretic?" *Mission Messenger* 25, no., 3 (March 1963): 33-39.

CONCLUSION

Again, we need to reexamine this old text through new eyes. The *heretic* is one who seeks his or her own way, whether right or wrong in one's interpretation. Paul is writing to Titus who is acting as pastor for a group of believers. He is not discussing the issues that John addresses in his Epistles concerning Jesus coming in the flesh and the denial that Jesus is the Messiah (2 John 7-10; 1 John 2:22-23) nor Paul's admonition to the Corinthians in 1 Corinthians 5 (man having sex with his father's wife). My objective in writing this chapter is to promote unity among God's people. I do not question the integrity of the men that I have reviewed in this study. I regard them as sincere and devoted to the things of God, but, at the same time, they are misinformed as to the true intent of Titus 3:10.

We, as a Christian community, must learn to examine a text within its *immediate* context, its *remote* context, and its *larger* context (other Scriptures dealing with the same subject outside of the book itself). If we, as a body of believers, wish to restore unity within the various Christian fellowships within Christendom, we must stop piece-meal interpretation. Citing a Scripture verbatim is not the answer. We must seek to uncover the author's intent through the *immediate* (verse immediately preceding and following) and *remote* context (the book itself). In conclusion, a citation from Leroy Garrett (1918-2015), professor and author, captures eloquently the role of so-called *heretics* down through the centuries:

The roll call of heretics in the history of thought is more honorific than it is infamous. The prophets who were stoned as heretics lie buried in tombs that are garnished by later generations. The scientists who were once silenced and excommunicated for their heterodoxy are today among the heroes admired by every schoolboy who studies the history of nations. The philosophers who were once exiled and poisoned as schismatics are now among the respected names in the annals of thought.³³

³³Leroy Garrett, "Who Is A Heretic?" *Mission Messenger* 25, no., 3 (March 1963): 33.