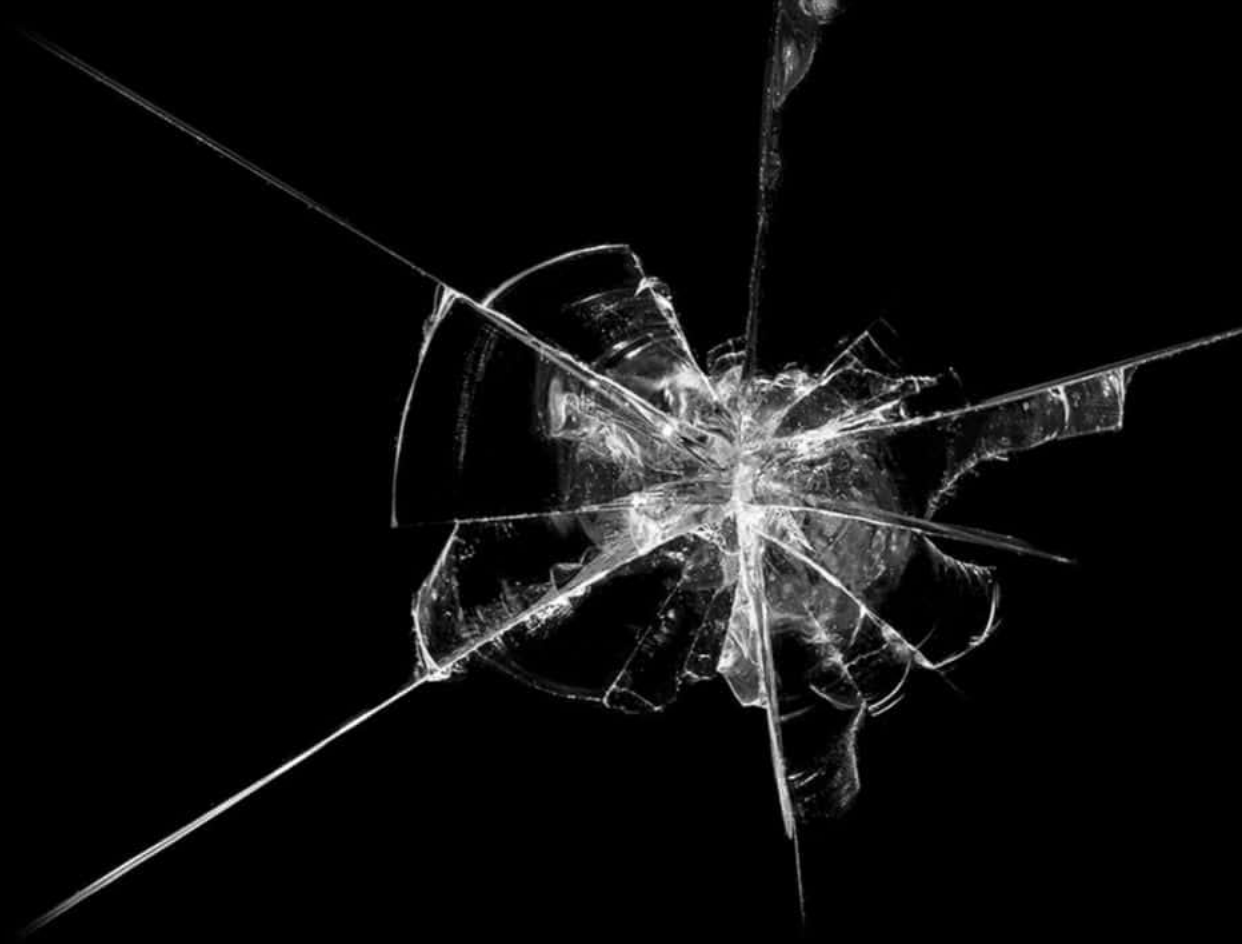


Responding to Factions and the Factious

Titus 3:9–11

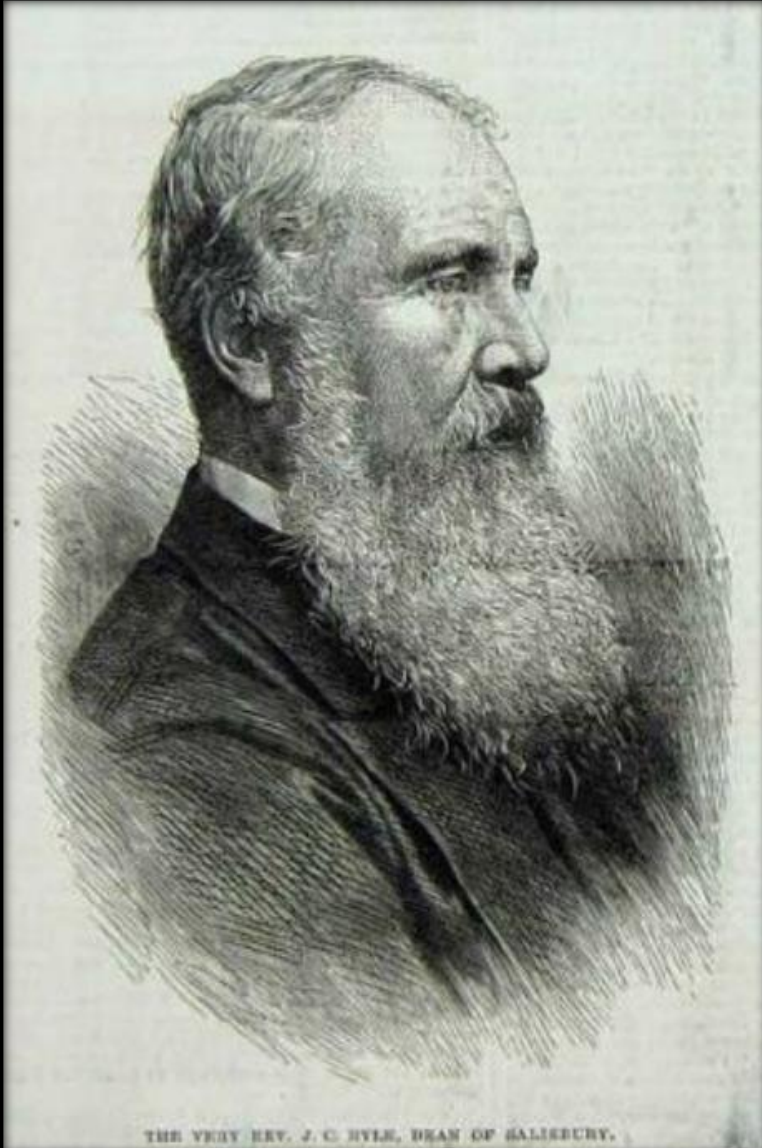


“But **avoid** foolish controversies and genealogies and strife and disputes about the Law, for they are unprofitable and worthless.

Reject a factious man after a first and second warning, knowing that such a man is perverted and is sinning, being self-condemned.”

I. The Right Response to Factions (v. 9)

II. The Right Response to the Factious (vv. 10–11)



“The cause of sin is never so much helped as when Christians waste their strength in quarreling with one another, and spend their time in petty squabbles.”

—J. C. Ryle, *Holiness*, 112

I. The Right Response to Factions (3:9)

“But avoid foolish controversies and genealogies and strife and disputes about the Law . . .” (v. 9a).

- “But” – Paul begins his instruction on factions by setting it in contrast to what he has just written.
 - **Titus 3:8** – “This is a trustworthy statement; and concerning these things I want you to speak confidently, so that those who have believed God will be careful to engage in good deeds. These things are good and profitable for men.”

- Paul's concern is for the health of the church *and* its witness:
 - **2:5** – “so that the word of God will not be dishonored.”
 - **2:8** – “so that the opponent will be put to shame, having nothing bad to say about us.”
 - **2:10** – “so that they will adorn the doctrine of God our Savior in every respect.”

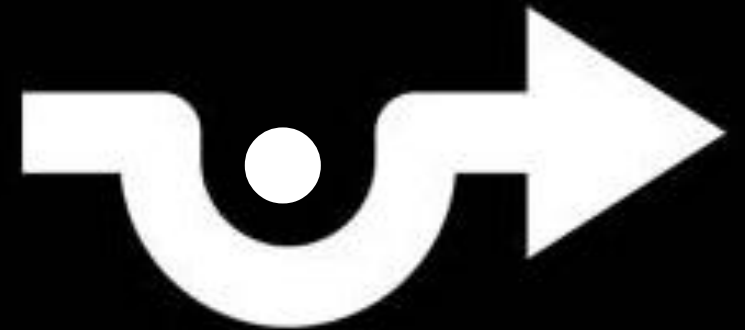
“Divisions in the church always breed
atheism in the world.”

—Thomas Manton



“But **avoid** foolish controversies and genealogies and
strife and disputes about the Law . . .”

- “**Avoid**” – the chief word of the sentence (v. 9).
 - In the original placed at the end for the sake of emphasis.
 - Def: “To go around so as to avoid,” “to circumvent,” “to shun.”
 - A present-tense imperative—a continuous practice in life.
 - Paul lists four things to be avoided.



“But avoid foolish controversies and genealogies and strife and disputes about the Law . . .”

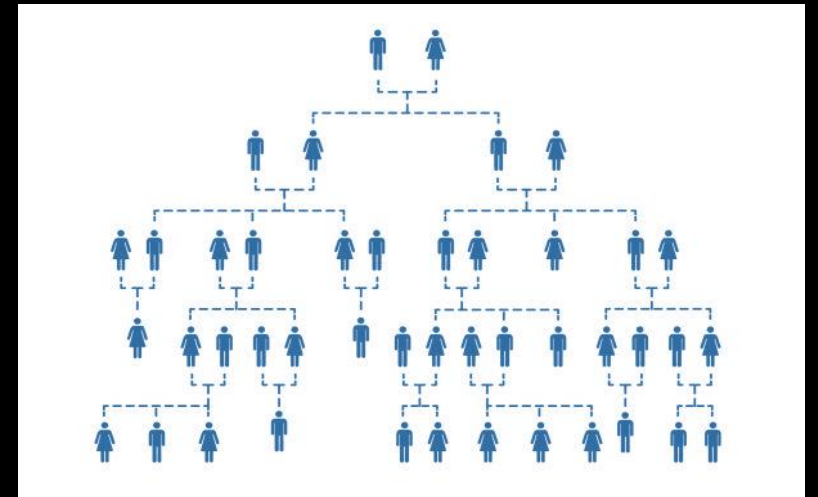
1) “Foolish controversies”

- “Foolish” – “stupid, moronic.”
- “Controversies” – “matters of dispute.”
- An unhealthy preoccupation with matters that do not warrant such emphasis, aggressively insisting that others do the same.
- Problem: *tactic*.

“But avoid foolish controversies and **genealogies** and strife and disputes about the Law . . .”

2) “Genealogies”

- “A Jewish type of interpretation based on OT and extracanonical stories of the biblical heroes and speculation based on family trees” (Towner, 795).
- A deviation from the emphasis of apostolic teaching.
- Problem: *substance*.



“But avoid foolish controversies and genealogies and **strife** and disputes about the Law . . .”

3) “Strife”

- “Engagement in rivalry, especially with reference to positions taken in a matter, *strife*, *discord*, *contention*.”
- Fighting for fighting’s sake.
- **Galatians 5:19–21** – “Now the deeds of the flesh are evident, which are: immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy”
- Problem: *tactic*.



“But avoid foolish controversies and genealogies and strife and **disputes about the Law** . . .”

4) “Disputes about the Law”

- “**Disputes**” – “fighting, but without weapons” (James 4:1); the opposite of “peaceable” (Titus 3:1–2).
- “**About the Law**” – the Mosaic Law; speculative interpretations, devotion to rules and regulations (Titus 1:10–11, 13–14; 1 Timothy 1:6–7).
- Problem: *substance*.

“...**for** they are **unprofitable** and **worthless**” (v. 9b).

- “**For**” – Paul now provides *two reasons* for why such factious discussions must be shunned.
 - 1) “**Unprofitable**” – “not being of any advantage” to the extent that they are even “harmful.”
 - 2) “**Worthless**” – “being of no use, empty, fruitless.”
- Such discussions are antithetical to what Paul taught in 3:1–8 (“These things are good and profitable for men,” v. 8b).

“If anyone advocates a different doctrine and does not agree with sound words, those of our Lord Jesus Christ, and with the doctrine conforming to godliness, he is conceited *and* understands nothing; but he has a morbid interest in controversial questions and disputes about words, out of which arise envy, strife, abusive language, evil suspicions, and constant friction between men of depraved mind and deprived of the truth, who suppose that godliness is a means of gain.”

—1 Timothy 6:3–5

“But refuse foolish and ignorant speculations, knowing that they produce quarrels. The Lord’s bond-servant must not be quarrelsome, but be kind to all, able to teach, patient when wronged, with gentleness correcting those who are in opposition, if perhaps God may grant them repentance leading to the knowledge of the truth.”

—2 Timothy 2:23–25

II. The Right Response to the Factious (vv. 10–11)

“Reject a factious man after a first and second warning . . .”
(v. 10).

- “Reject” – again, the chief word of the sentence (vv. 10–11).
 - As with v. 9, in the original this verb is placed at the end of the clause for the sake of emphasis.
 - “to reject, refuse someone,” “dismiss, drive out”—i.e., to remove from the fellowship.
 - A present-tense imperative—a continuous practice that is to be maintained by the church.

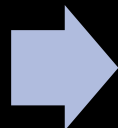
“Reject **a factious man** after a first and second warning . . .”
(v. 10).

- “A factious man” – literally, “a *heretical* man” (αἵρετικός, *hairetikos*).
 - Although after Paul’s day the word came to be used formally to describe a *false teacher*, in Paul’s day it described *one who caused divisions, created factions*.
 - Indeed, false *teachers* were a problem in Crete (1:10– 11).
 - But the problem here is also with false *conduct*—the refusal to submit to the emphases of the apostles.

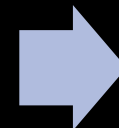
“Reject a factious man after a first and second warning . . .”
(v. 10).

- **“Warning”** – “counsel to cease an improper course of conduct”; i.e., a pastoral warning (see 1:13).
- **“After a first and second”** – Paul prescribes a *three-step process* for dealing with such men.

1. Reprove



2. Reprove



3. Remove

“If your brother sins, go and show him his fault in private;
if he listens to you, you have won your brother.

1

But if he does not listen *to you*, take one or two more
with you, so that BY THE MOUTH OF TWO OR THREE WITNESSES
EVERY FACT MAY BE CONFIRMED.

2

If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church;
and if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be
to you as a Gentile and a tax collector.”

3

4

—Matthew 18:15–17

“What the Lord laments and opposes, Satan applauds and fosters. Few things demoralize, discourage, and weaken a church as much as bickering, backbiting and fighting among its member. . . .

Because of quarrelling the Father is dishonored, the Son is disgraced, His people are demoralized and discredited, and the world is turned off and confirmed in unbelief. Fractured fellowship robs Christians of joy and effectiveness, robs God of glory, and robs the world of the true testimony of the gospel. A high price for an ego trip!”

—John MacArthur, *First Corinthians*, 24

“Satan greatly approves of our railing at each other, but God does not.”

—Charles Spurgeon



“If anyone does not obey our instruction in this letter, take special note of that person and do not associate with him, so that he will be put to shame. *Yet* do not regard him as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother.”

—2 Thessalonians 3:14

“... **knowing** that such a man **is perverted** and **is sinning,**
being self-condemned” (v. 11).

- **“Knowing”** – As with the previous sentence (v. 9), Paul provides an explanation to justify the seriousness of his instruction.
- **“Is perverted”** – “to cause to turn aside from what is true or morally proper,” “is warped”—a settled state.
- **“Is sinning”** – Paul identifies the repeated resistance of pastoral warnings as *sin*.
- **“Self-condemned”** – he has only himself to blame for his exclusion from the fellowship of the church.

SELF-EXAMINATION

- Are you one who regularly finds himself/herself embroiled in controversy?
- Do you enjoy debating for the sake of debating?
- Are the topics you debate tertiary issues that you have elevated to a matter of “first importance”?
- Are you quick to turn aggressive and disparaging in theological/spiritual discussions?
- Have you received but rejected the counsel of others to “stop biting the sheep”?



“On Controversy,” by John Newton (1725–1807)

“And yet we find but very few writers of controversy who have not been manifestly hurt by it. Either they grow in a sense of their own importance, or imbibe an angry, contentious spirit, or they insensibly withdraw their attention from those things which are the food and immediate support of the life of faith, and spend their time and strength upon matters which are at most but of a secondary value. This shows, that if the service is honorable, it is dangerous. What will it profit a man if he gains his cause and silences his adversary, if at the same time he loses that humble, tender frame of spirit in which the Lord delights, and to which the promise of his presence is made?”