

Lesson 4:  
Heretics or Reformers?

### Introduction

- There is a command to remove heretics from the church.  
“<sup>10</sup> As for a person who stirs up division (αἱρετικὸν ἄνθρωπον), after warning him once and then twice, have nothing more to do with him, <sup>11</sup> knowing that such a person is warped and sinful; he is self-condemned” (Titus 3:10-11).
- There is a “common salvation” and “faith” (Jude 3). To depart from that faith is to depart from salvation.  
“...<sup>19</sup> holding faith and a good conscience. By rejecting this, some have made shipwreck of their faith” (1 Timothy 1:19).

### What is heresy (αἵρεσις) and what is a heretic?

- The free choice of a rule of living, contrary to that rule which they stood obliged to before. Two things must concur to constitute an Heretic. Error *in fide*. 1 Timothy 1:19 and obstinate persistence. Titus 3:10.<sup>1</sup>
- Heresy is an error in the foundation of Christian Religion, taught and defended with obstinacy.<sup>2</sup>
- Heresy is an obstinate defense of any error against any necessary Article of the Christian faith.<sup>3</sup>
- It is an error in the foundation of Christian religion, taught and defended with obstinacy.<sup>4</sup>
- A heretic is he who doth err in the foundation of eternal salvation, that is to say, who doth fight against either the person or office of Christ, and doth stubbornly persevere in error.<sup>5</sup>
- Particular Baptists:  
He is an Heretic that chooses an Opinion by which some fundamental Article of the Christian Religion is subverted, which Religion before he professed, but now persists in this Opinion, contrary thereunto, notwithstanding proper means for his conviction hath been made use of; this description of an Heretic confirmed thus.
  1. That it is the choosing of a new Opinion, the signification of the word *Heresy* doth evince, which is derived from a word that signifies Election of Choice.
  2. That it is not every new Opinion, but that only that is subversive of a fundamental Truth, will easily be granted, otherwise Men must be rejected for every mistake that they are not presently convinced of: which is contrary to the rule of Christ, and that love and forbearance Christians ought to exercise towards one another.

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<sup>1</sup> Edward Leigh, *A Systeme or Body of Divinity* (London: A.M., 1662), Prolegomena.

<sup>2</sup> Johann Heinrich Alting, *Problemata Theologica, tam Theorica, quam Practica: Tomus Secundus* (Amsterdam, Joannem Janssonium, 1646), 316. Tom. 2. Part 2. Prob. 13.

<sup>3</sup> William Chillingworth, *The Religion of Protestants a Safe VVay to Salvation* (Oxford: Leonard Lichfield, 1638), 271.

<sup>4</sup> William Perkins, *A Commentarie or Exposition, vpon the fiue first Chapters of the Epistle to the Galatians* (Cambridge: John Legat, 1604), 432.

<sup>5</sup> Amandus Polanus, *The Substance of Christian Religion* (London: Arn Hatfield, 1600), 444-445.

3. He only is properly termed an Heretic, that has formerly professed the Christian Religion, because such a one is self-condemned, though perhaps not always in the present judgment of his Conscience, yet at least by his former Profession.

4. It is the persisting of such a Person in such an Heresy, after proper means has been used for his conviction, that doth denominate a man to be an Heretic; for a weak Christian may possibly be surprised by Temptation, and the subtilty of Deceivers, into such an Opinion, as obstinately maintained, would destroy the faith of the Person, who yet flies from the Snare as soon as it is discovered to him.<sup>6</sup>

- Distinctions:
  - Errors *contra* the foundation: Papist denial of the sufficiency of Christ's one sacrifice.
  - Errors *circa* the foundation: Lutheran affirmation about Christ's ubiquity. Though they have images of Christ, they do not worship them. Though they hold to the real presence of Christ's body in the sacrament, they do not adore it.
  - Errors *citra* the foundation: 1 Corinthians 3:11-15

### **Material Heresy, Formal Heretics, and the Balance of Charity with Custody**

- *Material Heresy*: There are some who contradictorily affirm heretical teachings while also affirming orthodox teachings about the same doctrine. Such persons' heretical teachings are, necessarily, material heresy. And yet, such persons defend orthodoxy, not seeing the incoherence and incompatibility of their affirmations.
- *Formal Heretics*: There are some who not only affirm heretical teachings, but also deny orthodox teachings about the same doctrines. These are formal heretics, because heresy is a departure, a rejection. "Have nothing more to do with them."
- The Lutherans maintain that Christ hath a true human nature, and yet some of them say that Christ is everywhere [in his human nature]. Though this be contrary to the former by consequence, yet I am bound to judge that they take Christ to be true man still, because indeed they do so, not seeing the contradiction.<sup>7</sup>
- I nothing doubt, for all that, but there are within the Romish Church, thousands of pious and devout souls, whose education and other unhappy circumstances, God will in great mercy consider; and, though under gross error and much ignorance, will bring them through the power of his grace unto salvation. If their foundation be upon the rock, though they have built thereon Hay and stubble, they may indeed suffer loss, but shall escape utter ruin.<sup>8</sup>
- I no way doubt, but that many men do receive more grace from God, than they understand or will own; and have a greater efficacy of it in them, than they will believe. Men may be really saved, by that grace which doctrinally they do deny; and they may be justified by the imputation of that righteousness which in opinion they deny to be imputed.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Thomas Collier, *A Brief and true NARRATIVE of the unrighteous dealings with Thomas Collier, a Member and Minister of the Church usually assembling at Southwick in the County of Wilts.* (n.p., 1677), 12-16.

<sup>7</sup> Leigh, *A Systeme or Body of Divinity*, Prolegomena.

<sup>8</sup> John Owen, *A Short and Plain Answer to Two Questions* (London: T.N., 1682), 9.

<sup>9</sup> John Owen, *The Doctrine of Justification by Faith Through the Imputation of the Righteousness of Christ* (London: R. Boulter, 1677), 228-229.