

When Warnings Do Not Work: Ostracism/Excommunication (Titus 3:9-11)

1. Four Subjects to Avoid (verse 9)

Avoid: in the Greek, it means to be a “bystander.” It means to “stand around.” It is a figure of speech that means “to turn about for the purpose of avoiding something.”

A. Foolish Controversies

“Foolish” in the Greek is where we get our English word “moron.” Paul commands Titus to avoid discussing “stupid” things that are unprofitable and speculative at best.

- Paul is not commanding Titus to avoid addressing unnecessary controversy. We already saw (Titus 1:10-11, 13-14) that he was to deal with false teaching swiftly by rebuking them.
- These “controversies” may refer to the Gnostics and Greek philosophers who would be rambling ethereal, abstract, and philosophical nonsense.
- While Jesus, and His disciples and apostles were continually involved in debates, they were on major theological truths and matters of interpreting the Law.
- False teaching in Scripture unsettles the soul (Acts 15:24), shipwrecks the faith (1 Timothy 1:19), leads to the ruining of the hearers (2 Timothy 2:14), produces ungodliness (2 Timothy 2:16) and spreads like gangrene (2 Timothy 2:17).

Profitable conversation and discussion are marked by:

- Thinking before speaking (Proverbs 16:23).
- Being convinced of what you have believed (Romans 14:5).
- Both sides communicating and understanding each parties’ positions.
- An awareness that the LORD will bring every idle word into account on the Day of Judgment (Matthew 12:36).

B. Genealogies

- Paul has in mind Jewish debates in genealogies, family origin and lineage. Jewish heritage and family history defined the Jew. Genealogies in Scripture were primarily required so that the Jewish nation would recognize the Messiah when he came: genealogies pointed the nation of Israel to their Messiah.
- Divine Pedigree takes the priority. The children of Abraham are not physical, but spiritual (Galatians 3:7).

C. Dissentions (Arguments)

- Verbal readiness and affection for disputes.

D. Strife

- Enmity and bitterness that is often times associated with violence. It refers to persistent contention, bickering and petty disagreement and antagonistic competitiveness that fights to have its own way regardless of the cost or harm to others.
- Strife is typical of those who are unsaved (Romans 1:29), who belong to the night (Romans 13:13), produce ungodly divisions (1 Corinthians 1:11), who operate under the deeds of the flesh (1 Corinthians 3:3; 2 Corinthians 12:20) and who preach Christ from selfish motives (Philippians 1:15).

2. Two Warnings (verse 10)

Goal of the First Warning: to genuinely understand the situation, clear up any misunderstanding, clarify church's position on subject, and to request that he would stop proselytizing. It is imperative that there are no "gray areas." The individual may not even be aware of what they are doing (it may be an offense of innocence). Up to this point we do not know the motives and the heart of the person.

Result of the Second Warning: It is clear that after the first warning, this individual is no longer operating in innocence, but defiance. The true intentions of the person's heart are exposed. They are warned of church discipline and asked to leave to find another church (if they are saved). By this time, most dissenters would have left.

3. One Option (verse 11)

- Refusing all human efforts to reform, repent and change, the only other option is excommunication and social ostracism.
- In excommunication, he is not allowed anywhere on church property or events.
- In social ostracism, there is no eating, drinking, or fellowship. No contact at all. Why? Heretics never get tired of fights and quarrels. They are warped and sinful and will not yield to human pleadings and endeavors.
- It is not an intellectual problem that they can be convinced of; it is a deep-rooted moral and spiritual problem that God alone needs to deal with. Get out of the way.
- To sit and eat with this person is to encourage rebellion and sin. Fellowship in any manner may be a hindrance to God working on the person's heart.

This whole process, from both warnings to ostracism is to allow repentance and humility to work in the heart of the sinner who is defiant to any authority and who rejoices in wreaking havoc in the church.