

George Gillespie  
A Treatise of Miscellany Questions

“Heresy is a gross and dangerous error, voluntarily held and factiously maintained by some person or persons within the visible church, in opposition to some chief or substantial truth or truths grounded upon and drawn from the holy Scripture by necessary consequence.“

What is meant in Scripture by the word Heresies, and how we are to understand, that there must be Heresies for making manifest the Godly party, or those that are approved, 1 Cor. 11:19.

“For there must be also heresies among you (saith the Apostle), that they which are approved may be made manifest among you;” or, as others read, “that they which are approved among you may be manifest.”

By heresies, here, some understand no more but divisions and sects, and conceive that heresies, in point of opinion or doctrine, are not here meant. So Chrysostom, Erasmus, and others. If so, then the very divisions and sects will make a discovery of who are approved, who not, before it comes to heretical opinions, i.e., sectaries are not approved, and those who are indeed approved are none of theirs, but keep themselves unspotted and free from them. So, Titus 3:10, [Gk.] heretikon [an heretic] is rendered in the Tigurine Bible sectarum authorem, and in the margin, factiosum, i.e., a man that is an author of sects (or factions), after the first and second admonition reject; and, 1 Cor. 11:19, they read, oportet enim et sectas in vobis esse [indeed, it is right that there are divisions among you].

Sometimes the word [Gk.] heresis is taken in the New Testament for a sect, yet (to note that by the way) only for such a sect as either was indeed, or was esteemed to be, of some heretical opinion, as Acts 5:17; 15:5; 24:5; 26:5; 28:22. The apostle has the word [Gk.] heresis twice in his epistles, and in both places he makes some difference and distinction between heresies and divisions, or strifes and variance, 1 Cor. 11:18-19; Gal. 5:20. For every division, strife, or variance, is not heresy; therefore, in the text which I now speak to, I understand heresy to be somewhat more than division.

The Arabic, 1 Cor. 12:25, that is in the Greek, and our translations, 1 Cor. 11:19, repeats the word schisms out of the preceding verse, and adds, moreover, the word heresies, reading [Gk.] skismata kai heresis [schisms and heresies], for there must arise schisms and heresies among you, that those of you who are godly may be known. It seems that they who understand only divisions to be meant by the word heresies, do not observe the rising of the apostle’s speech; for, after he has spoken of their [Gk.] skismata, or schismatical divisions, contrary to the rule of love, he adds, [Gk.] Dei gar kai hereseis, etc., for there must also be heresies among you.[1] I partly believe it, says he, that there are divisions among you; for there must be not only schisms, but, worse than that, there must be heresies also. If you ask now, “What is heresy?” I shall, without any

implicit following of writers, ground my answer on scripture itself. And I answer first negatively, then positively.

Negatively.

1. Heresy is neither to be so far taken at large as to be extended to every error which may be confuted by scripture, although, happily, such an error be too tenaciously maintained; nor yet is it to be so far restricted as that no error shall be accounted heretical but that which is destructive to some fundamental article of the Christian faith; if, by a fundamental article, you understand such a truth, without the knowledge and faith whereof it is impossible to get salvation. When Peter Martyr defines heresy, he makes no mention of a fundamental error, but of an error contrary to the scriptures, *Loc. Com.*, class. 2, cap. 4, sect. 50. So Calvin (*Instit.*, lib. 4, cap. 2, sect. 5), understands all such to be heretics as make a breach in the church by false doctrines. *Walæus* (tom. 1, p. 57) says heretical churches do either err in the foundation, or only in some other things built upon the foundation. When Peter speaks of such heresies as take away the very foundation, Jesus Christ, he thinks it too little to call them simple heresies, but he calls these “damnable heresies” [2 Pet. 2:1]. But if you understand by fundamental truths all the chief and substantial principles (I do not mean only the first rudiments, or A, B, C, of a catechism, which we, first of all, put to new beginners; but I mean all such truths as are commonly put in the confessions of faith, and in the more full and large catechisms of the reformed churches; or all such truths as all and every one who lives in a true Christian reformed church are commanded and required to learn and know, as they expect, in the ordinary dispensation of God, to be saved), in this sense I may yield that heresy is always contrary to some fundamental truth.

It is one thing to dispute of the absolute sovereign power of God, and what are the truths without the belief whereof it is absolutely and altogether impossible that one can be saved; which question, I doubt, is hardly determinable by scripture; nor do I know what edification there is in the canvassing of it; sure I am it is a question much abused. It is another thing to dispute what are those truths which, in a church where the gospel is truly preached, all and every one, come to years of knowledge and discretion, and having the means and occasion to learn, are bound to know; and according to the revealed will and ordinary dispensation of God, must learn, as they desire or expect to have a true fellowship with Christ in the sacrament of the Lord’s supper, or to be accepted of God, and saved eternally.

2. We must not think that no man is a heretic but he who is consistorially or judicially admonished, and thereafter continues pertinaciously in his error; for where it is said, *Titus 3:10*, “A man that is an heretic, after the first and second admonition, reject,” it is intimated that he was an heretic before such an admonition.

Positively. I conceive that these six things do concur to make a heresy:

1. It is an error held by some minister or member of a church; I mean either a true church, or an assembly pretending and professing to be a true church. For both Peter and Paul,

where they foretell that heresies were to come, 2 Pet. 2:1; 1 Cor. 11:19, they add [Gk.] εν ημιν, among you, i.e., among you Christians; so, Acts 20:30, “Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things.” Therefore the scripture gives not the name of heretics to those who are altogether without the visible church, but it calls such by the names of heathens or unbelievers, or they that are without, or the like.

2. It is an error voluntarily and freely chosen, both in the first invention or broaching of it (which is proper to the heresiarchs), and in the maintaining of it or adhering to it (which is common to all heretics). This I collect from the very name which the scripture gives to it; for [Gk.] heresis comes from [Gk.] hereomai, I choose. Therefore we give not the name of heretics to such Christians as are compelled, in time of persecution, to profess such an error, which, peradventure, were a formal heresy, if voluntarily and without compulsion professed. They ought, indeed, to die, and to endure the greatest torments, before they profess what they know to be an error. But this their sin is not properly called heresy, for an heretic does freely and voluntarily hold that which is in his error. And, in this respect and consideration, Tertullian thinks that a heretic is said to be [Gk.] autokatakritos, condemned of himself, Titus 3:11, because he has of himself chosen that which does condemn him.[2] The apostle there has commanded to reject an heretic. If I reject him (might one say) then I lose him, I destroy his soul. Nay (says the apostle), his perdition is of himself, for he has chosen his own ways, and his soul delights in his abominations. This interpretation is much surer and safer than to say that a heretic is called [Gk.] autokatakritos, or self-condemned, because he goes against his own light, and against the principles received and acknowledged by himself; which sense is accompanied with many dangerous consequences.

3. It is such a choosing of error as is accompanied with a rejecting of truth. A heretic puts light for darkness, and darkness for light; good for evil, and evil for good; he chooses error as truth, and refuses truth as error. They that give heed to seducing spirits and doctrines of devils, do also “depart from the faith,” 1 Tim. 4:1; “resist the truth,” 2 Tim. 3:8; and “turn away their ears from the truth,” 2 Tim. 4:4. Their course has a terminus a quo [end from which] as well as ad quem [to which].

4. It is an error professed and maintained, and which, by that means, becomes a scandal and snare to others. For although there may be heresy (as well as other kinds of sin) lurking and hid in the thoughts, yet that belongs to God’s judgment only, not to man’s. The heresies which are spoken of, 1 Cor. 11:9, are certainly known, and apparently discriminative, even among men. And heretics are scandalous persons, to be avoided and rejected, Rom. 16:17; Titus 3:10; which could not be except their errors were known.

5. It is an error contradictory of some chief and substantial truth, grounded upon, or, by necessary consequence, drawn from holy scripture. There was never yet any heretic in the Christian world who contradicted that which is literally and syllabically in scripture. The most damnable heretic will offer to subscribe to the scripture instead of a confession of faith, who yet will not subscribe to all truths which necessarily follow from the words of scripture. But I call not every error heresy, which is contrary to any consequential truth

grounded upon scripture. As the scripture reckons not all who sin to be “workers of iniquity,” so it reckons not all who err to be heretics. Although there is not any sin or error in the true nature of it venial, yet every sin is not a gross and heinous sin, and every error is not heresy. Heresies are mentioned as greater evils than schisms, 1 Cor. 11:18-19, which could not be so if every error were an heresy.

6. It is an error factiously maintained, with a renting of the church, and drawing away of disciples after it, in which respect Augustine said, *Errare potero, hæreticus non ero* I may err, but I shall not be an heretic.” Heretics are deceivers and seducers, who endeavour to pervert others and to overthrow their faith, 2 Tim. 3:13; Acts 20:30; 2 Tim. 2:17-18; Rom. 16:17-19; 2 Pet. 2:2. All known and noted heretics are also schismatics, who make a rupture, and strengthen their own party by drawing after them, or confirming unto them disciples and followers (in so much that [Gk.] *heresis* often used for a sect, as Acts 5:17; 15:5; 24:5; 26:5). For this cause the Donatists were condemned as heretics, without imputation of heresy to Cyprian. “And, O strange turning about of things (says Vincentius Lirinensis, *Advers. Hæret. [Against Heretics]*, cap. 11), the authors of the same opinion are judged catholic, but the followers heretics; the masters are absolved, the disciples are condemned; the writers of these books are the children of the kingdom, but hell shall receive the asserters or maintainers.” This last ingredient which is found in heresy is hinted by the Arabic interpreter, 1 Cor. 11:19, where he joins schisms and heresies, as was noted before; and, indeed, in the original, the particle [Gk.] *kai* [and], and the rising of the speech, sets forth heresy as carrying schism with it in its bosom. I believe, says the apostle, in part, what I hear of your schisms, for “there must be also heresies,” i.e., both schisms and somewhat more. Calvin, *Institut.*, lib. 4, cap. 2, sect. 5, makes the breaking of church communion, and the making of a rent, a thing both common to heretics and schismatics: for heretics break one band of church communion, which is consent in doctrine; schismatics break another, which is love, though sometimes they agree in the like faith.

From all which scriptural observations, we may make up a description of heresy to this sense: Heresy is a gross and dangerous error, voluntarily held and factiously maintained by some person or persons within the visible church, in opposition to some chief or substantial truth or truths grounded upon and drawn from the holy scripture by necessary consequence.

But next, Why says the apostle that “there must be heresies?” This is not a simple or absolute necessity, but *ex hypothesi* [one that follows from supposition]. I mean not only upon supposition of Satan’s malice and men’s corruption, but upon supposition of God’s eternal and infallible foreknowledge; and not only so, but upon supposition of the eternal decree to permit Satan and corrupt men to introduce heresies into the church, purposing, in the most wise and most holy counsel of his will, to disabuse (as I may so say) his church by these heresies; that is, to order and overrule them, for the praise of his grace and mercy, to manifest such as are approved; and from the glory of his justice, in sending strong delusions upon such as received not the love of the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness. These things being so, i.e., Satan’s malice and men’s corruption being such, and there being such a foreknowledge, yea, such a decree in

God, therefore it is that there must be heresies. And so we are also to understand Matt. 18:7, "It must needs be that offences come." These things I do but touch by the way.

That which I here aim at, is the good use which God, in his most wise and sovereign providence, can and does make of heresies. It is, "that they which are approved may be made manifest;" where, by [Gk.] *hoi dokimoi* they which are approved, we can understand nothing but such as are true and sincere saints, approved and accepted of God; or (as Bullinger on the place) *vere pii*, truly godly, in which sense the word is used, Rom. 16:10; 2 Cor. 10:18; 2 Tim. 2:15; James 1:12. The word is properly used of good money, or silver well-refined, [Gk.] *argurion*. It is transferred to the saints with special reference to their mortification, or to the refining of them from the dross of their corruptions, and so notes such as walk in the Spirit, and not in the flesh. The contrary word is [Gk.] *hoi adokimoi*, reprobate, rejectaneous, naughty, or to be cast away like the dross of silver, 1 Cor. 9:27; 2 Cor. 13:5-6.

But how is it that by means or occasion of heresies the godly party is made manifest? Surely the meaning of the apostle is not that the authors and followers of heresies are the godly party, for he calls heresy a work of the flesh, Gal. 5:20, and will have an heretic to be rejected, as one who is of himself condemned, Titus 3:10. Therefore, most certainly, his meaning is that [Gk.] *hoi dokimoi*, they which are approved, are known by this as one of their characters: they hate, avoid, and resist heresies, and earnestly contend for the faith; they hold fast the truth of Christ without wavering. And those who broach or adhere unto heresies, are thereby known to be [Gk.] *adokimoi*, unapproved, and such as are like reprobate silver.

Whosoever, therefore, sides or engages with heresies or heretics yea, whosoever stands not fast in the faith does, ipso facto [by that very deed], declare himself to be none of Paul's godly party: so contrary is the language of the Holy Ghost to the tone of sectaries in these days. Neither is it in this scripture alone, but in diverse other scriptures, that the Holy Ghost distinguishes those that are approved of God, from such as turn from the truth after false doctrines, and believe seducing spirits, as well as from those who are of an ungodly life.

So Deut. 13:3, when a false prophet arose, and the sign or wonder came to pass, what was God's meaning in permitting these things? "The Lord your God proveth you to know whether ye love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul." They, therefore, that hearkened to the false prophet, even when his sign or wonder came to pass, made themselves known thereby, that they had not been lovers of God with all their heart.

Again, Matt. 24:24, those that are elect are not deceived by false Christs and the false prophets; and, by the rule of contraries, they who are deceived by them, and go in their error to the end, are not elect, but reprobate, Gal. 5:20-21.

Heresy is a work of the flesh, and is reckoned among those things which render a person incapable of inheriting the kingdom of God. They, therefore, who walk in the Spirit, and

not in the flesh, and are made meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light, are not only no heretics, but resist and oppose heresy, as being a work of the flesh, John 8:31. They who are Christ's disciples, indeed, continue in his word; they who continue not in his word, are not his disciples indeed, 1 John 2:24, with 2 John, ver. 9. They who have fellowship with the Father and the Son abide in the doctrine of Christ; they who abide not in the doctrine of Christ have no fellowship with the Father and the Son: the like in diverse other scriptures.

If, therefore, there must be heresies, even for this reason, to make more manifest who are approved, who not, then let no thoughts arise in our hearts toward the accusing of divine providence in this particular. Justin Martyr, *Quæst. et Respons. ad Orthod.* [Questions and Responses on the Subject of Orthodoxy] quest. 1, answering this doubt: "If God has taken away the idolatries, superstitions, and false religions of the heathens, and has also abolished the Jewish worship, why has he suffered heresies to enter into the Christian church?" He gives this solution: that although heresies come into the church through men's negligence and slothfulness (for while men slept, the enemy sowed the tares among the wheat, Matt. 13:25), yet the providence of God was no way slothful in the business. For he foresaw and foretold that heresies should come, and has given plain warning in his word concerning the same. He adds, that the same God who did destroy the heathenish and the Jewish religion, will also destroy heresies, after he has suffered them for a time. Although we have not distinct knowledge what God intends to work of heresies, yet we ought not to censure, but humbly and reverently to adore God's most wise and most holy (though secret and unsearchable) dispensations.

If we should see somewhat which is deadly poison among some drugs, which a skilled and approved physician is making use of, we must not rashly censure the physician; for he knows how to disabuse that which is in itself poisonous, and to make it one of the ingredients in a most sovereign medicine. Or if we should come into the shop of a curious artificer, or engineer, and there see some ugly and ill-favoured instruments, which we think serve for no good, but for evil, yet it were foolishly done to censure the artificer, who knows to make an excellent good use of these things, though we know not.

How much more foolish and sinful is it, to suffer thoughts to rise in our hearts against the wisdom and providence of God, even although we know not what he intends to work out of such things? We were most of all inexcusable to accuse his providence, now when he has made known in his word to us, that, by occasion of heresies, he will make manifest who are approved, and who not. "Wherefore," says Chrysostom (*de Divers. etc.*, tom. loc., ser. 21), "that no man might say, 'Why has Christ permitted this?' Paul says, 'This permission shall not hurt you, if you are one who is approved, for by this means you shall be made more manifest.' "

Yet all this cannot excuse either the heretics or sectaries themselves, or those who connive at them. For that which Christ says in genere [in general], of scandals, is true, in specie [in particular], of heresies. It must needs be that heresies come, but woe to him by whom they come. I add, and woe also to him who does not, according to his place and calling, endeavour the extirpation of them. The text which I now speak to, 1 Cor.

11:19, has not reference to the will of God's commandment, which is the rule of our duty, but to the will of God's decree, or the secret counsel of his will. It is God's purpose to permit heresies, and to overrule them for this end, that his graces may the more shine forth, and that even heresies (contrary to the intentions of Satan and heretics) may make manifest who are approved. Scilicet quos non potuerint depravare, says Tertullian, opening this scripture (de Præser. Adv. Hær.), to wit (says he): Such as heresies could not pervert and deprave, no other are the approved ones.

But there are two things may be here objected. 1. May not one chosen, and justified, and regenerate, be drawn away and infected with heresy, through the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness whereby they lie in wait to deceive? If so, then heresies do not make manifest who are approved, who not. 2. May not many who are not approved of God be preserved from the infections of heresies yea, be forward in resisting and opposing them? If so, then preservation from, and resisting of heresies, cannot make manifest that one is approved of God. These objections are no more against me than against the text of scripture.

To the first I answer: A regenerate person may be tempted and drawn over to heresy as he may be tempted and drawn over to other great sins. Heresy does no otherwise consist with the state of grace in any person than other works of the flesh, adultery, fornication, drunkenness, or the like. Look upon an elect and justified person while lying in some great sin for instance, Noah, Lot, David, Peter even so must you look upon an elect and justified person poisoned with heresy. But then, that person, being elected, justified, and regenerate, cannot be supposed to live and die in that sinful estate; but God will certainly heal his backslidings, and rescue his soul out of the snare of the devil by repentance; for the elect cannot be deceived so as to continue and die in heresy, Matt. 24:24.

And while he continues in such a gross sin or heresy, you may truly say that, for that time, he is [Gk.] adokimos, unapproved, or like dross and unrefined silver; in which sense the word is used by the apostle, where he speaks of his bringing his body into subjection, lest he himself should be found [Gk.] adokimos. Where the old English translation reads, "Lest I myself should be reprov'd" which is too soft a word the new translation has, "Lest I myself should be a castaway. Beza [has], Ne ipse rejectaneus fiam [Lest I myself become rejectable]. In the same sense it is used, 2 Cor. 13:5, "Know ye not your own selves, how that Jesus Christ is in you, except ye be reprobates?" Beza, Nisi rejectanei estis [Unless you are to be rejected]. H. Stephanus expones ajdovkimo", Minime probus non probandus: Item adulterinus non sincerus. [By no means should a virtuous man not be proven to be so: just as much should a false man be found insincere.] And he cites Aristotle, [Gk.] Adokimon hepoiase nomisma, [Behaviour renders one unapproved]. In this sense even an elect and regenerate person, supposed to be a maintainer or follower of heresy, while such, is certainly [Gk.] adokimos, unapproved, greatly reprobable, to be rejected and cast away to the furnace like dross and unrefined silver. And no marvel; for, in that estate, he does not act his graces, but his corruptions, and, by his great sin, does extremely grieve, and dangerously quench, the Holy Spirit once given to him.

To the other objection I answer: 1. Although the full and perfect discovery (who are approved, who not) is reserved to the great and last day, and there is no company, assembly, nor visible church in this world, without a mixture of hypocrites, yet surely the word of the Lord has been, and shall be, so far fulfilled, that, in a great measure, and according to the knowledge which the church can have of her members in this life, there is, in times of heresies and schisms, a discovery made who are the approved ones, who not.

2. We must remember it is not the scope of this text to give us a note of distinction between those who are approved, and all counterfeits or unapproved Christians, but between those who are approved, and those who are the fomenters or followers of heresies. Thus they who are indeed approved of God continue in the truth of Christ, grounded and settled, and stand fast in the faith, and contend for it; and this is one of the characters found in all such as are approved. And thus far, says Augustine,[3] are heretics profitable to the church; for by their means those who are approved of God, and spiritual men, are stirred up to vindicate, open, and hold forth the truth, whereby they become more manifest than otherwise they could have been. Upon the other part, whoever turn away from the truth, and from the doctrine of Christ, and turn aside after heresies, do thereby infallibly declare themselves to be unapproved, whatsoever profession or show of holiness they have.

Whatsoever becomes of the white mark of those who are approved (which also holds true as I have explained it), most certainly this black mark cannot fail upon the other side. And he who supposes any person who is of an heretical belief and faction to be holy, spiritual, mortified, and approved or one that walks in the Spirit, and not in the flesh does but suppose that which is impossible. And I do not doubt but God is, by the heresies and schisms of these times, making a discovery of many unapproved, unmortified professors, who pretended to piety. So that I may transfer to our time what Chrysostom observed of his own, *Ad eos qui Scandalizati Sunt* [To Those Who Have Been Scandalized], lib. 1, cap. 19: “How many are there clothed with a shadow and show of godliness; how many who were thought to be some great ones, and they were not so, have been, in this time (when so many fall off and make defection), quickly manifested, and their hypocrisy detected.” They have appeared what they were, not what they feigned themselves, and most falsely pretended to be.

Neither is this a small matter, but very much for the profit and edification of those that will observe it, even to know distinguishingly those who are clothed in sheeps’ clothing, and not to reckon promiscuously those wolves (so hid) among the true sheep. For this time has become a furnace, discovering the false copper coin, melting the lead, burning up the precious metals. This also Paul signified when he said, “For there must be also heresies among you, that they which are approved may be made manifest among you.”

Vincentius Lirinensis does also record to this purpose, that when almost the who world was infected with the Arian heresy, some being compelled to it, others cheated into it, yet every true lover and worshipper of Christ was preserved pure from it.[4]

1. Tertull. de Præscript. Advers. Hæret. Cum ideo credidisse se dictat (Apostolus) de schismalibus et dissensionibus quai scilicet etiam hæreses oporteret esse. Ostendit enim gravioris mali respectu, de levioribus se facile credidisse. [Tertullian, On Objections Against Heretics. “So when he (the apostle) says, on the subject of divisions and dissensions, that certainly he believes there should be even heresies; in fact, by consideration of the weightier evil, he shows that he easily believes it about the less serious cases.”]

2. Tertull. de Præscript. Advers. Hæret. Hæreses dictæ græca voce ex interpretatione electionis, quia quis sive ad instituendas sive ad suscipiendas eas utitur. Ideo et sibi damnatum dixit hæreticum: quia et in quo damnatur sibi elegit. [“They are called heresies in the Greek tongue by a translation of ‘choosing,’ because one uses it for either the planting of them or an entering upon them. For this reason he called the heretic ‘self-condemned,’ since he chose for himself that in which he is condemned.”]

3. August., tom. 1, lib. de Vera Relig., cap. 8. Sunt enim innumerabiles in ecclesia sancta, Deo probati viri, sed manifesti non fiunt inter nos, quam diu imperitiæ nostræ tenebris delectatidormire malumus, quam lucem veritatis intueri. [Augustine, tom. 1, On True Religion, ch. 8. “Indeed there are countless men, approved by God, in the holy church, but they do not become apparent among us as long as we prefer to sleep, delighted by the shadows of our ignorance, rather than to give attention to the light of truth.”]

4. Vin. Lirin. Advers. Hær., cap. 6. Tunc quisquis verus Christi amator et cultor exstitit antiquam fidem novellæ perfidæ præferendo, nulla contagii ipsius peste maculatus est. [“At that time, whoever stood out as a true lover and worshipper of Christ by his preference for the former faith over the just-hatched treachery, was not polluted by any of the ruin brought about by that infection.”]