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A0507 -- Feb. 13, 2005 – 3 John 9-10 – Historical Development of Church

Let's briefly review vv 5-8, the **Encouragement of Gaius**. **Gaius** was an advanced student of Scripture. He was living out his advanced status by walking in the truth. By walking in the truth **Gaius** is commended in v. 5 as being faithful whenever he supports orthodox traveling ministers whether he knows them personally or not. How was Gaius being **faithful**? He was being faithful to God by being faithful to the children of God. Whenever you are faithful to God's children you are being faithful to God as well. That's a principal you want to take to the bank. Faithfulness to the children of God is faithfulness to the Father of the children. You can't be unfaithful to the children of God and remain faithful to God. The two go hand in hand. Either you are faithful to both or you are unfaithful to both. Gaius was being faithful to God whenever he supported the traveling ministers.

The next principal is found in v. 6a. Not only was **Gaius** being faithful but he was "loving". The traveling ministers had reported back to John and part of that report was that **Gaius** was a loving individual. **Gaius** had responded to the needs of the tired traveling ministers and had provided appropriate lodging, food, and provision for their future journey. He was loving not only by word but by deed and in truth (1 John 3:18). The pressure was certainly on **Gaius** to cut off his support temporarily because of the threats of the evil **Diotrephes**. **Diotrephes** was a domineering man who threatened to excommunicate people from the church who helped these traveling ministers. So, you can see, tensions were high. John is encouraging **Gaius** to not fold under the pressure but continue to live faithfully to God, to continue to walk in the truth, by continuing to support orthodox traveling ministers. The principal is for you as a Christian to maintain walking by faith even under the pressures of the American culture as it gradually tears away our religious freedoms. Stand up and fight for them. Don't lay down your arms. We already know we will have persecution in the world; but take courage, Christ has overcome the world (John 16:33) and so have you if you have believed in the name of the Son of God (1 John 5:1ff). Don't put down the sword of faith but learn to wield it through persecutions.

Verse 7 gives us the reason why we should support these orthodox traveling ministers. We should support them because they went out solely **for the sake of the Name**. That **Name** is Jesus Christ. They did not go out to make a buck. They went out **accepting nothing from the Gentiles**. The **Gentiles** were unbelieving pagans who might be trying to relieve a guilty conscience by giving to a religions organization. These traveling ministers did not only refuse to ask them for support but refused to accept support from them whenever offered. They were interested in being supported solely by Christians. They were not in the business of relieving the guilty conscience of unbelievers. That is the business of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Guilt can only be removed by the cross. By trusting in Jesus Christ as your substitute and payment for each and every sin, past, present, and future as well as for your sin nature from which personal sin grows. If they would have received support from the pagan Gentiles they would have amounted to saying Christ is not sufficient and Christ cannot supply all our needs. This is one reason it is not biblical to go into debt to unbelievers. Whenever we go in debt to unbelievers we have reflected poorly on Christ. We have denied His leadership, His guidance, His omnipotence. We've made Him look bad before the world. We've said, "Our God cannot supply all our needs". And any god, who cannot supply all our needs is no god at all, is he?

Finally, verse 8 is the logical conclusion. If these traveling ministers were orthodox, if they refused help from unbelievers, and if they went out solely for the Name of Christ then **we ought to support such men**. We ought to support them with lodging, food, and provision for their future journey. This means we check out their doctrine. Do they believe in the fundamentals of the faith; the virgin birth, the inerrancy of Scripture, the perfect humanity of Christ, the full deity of Christ, the substitutionary blood atonement, the bodily resurrection, etc...If they believe these things then we ought to willingly and lovingly receive them and fellowship with them. When we do we reap the wonderful rewards of being **fellow-workers with the truth**. We become a part of the active dissemination of **truth**. This is a joy and reaps eternal rewards.

Are we going to follow the good example of **Gaius** and stand up under the pressures or are we going to follow the evil example of **Diotrephes** who we turn to next in vv. 9-10? Let's read these important verses from the New American Standard Bible.

⁹ I wrote something to the church; but Diotrephes, who loves to be first among them, does not accept what we say. ¹⁰ For this reason, if I come, I will call attention to his deeds which he does, unjustly accusing us with wicked words; and not satisfied with this, he himself does not receive the brethren, either, and he forbids those who desire *to do so* and puts *them* out of the church.

C. Condemnation of Diotrophes (9-10)

Greek Text 9 Egrapsa te ekklesia; all o philoproteuon auton Diotrophes ouk epidechetai emas

Translation 9 I wrote something to the church, but he who loves the preeminence, Diotrophes, does not receive us.

Gaius might wonder why he was receiving a letter rather than **the church**. To answer this John recounts what happened to the last letter he sent to **the church**. **The church** here refers to Gaius' particular local church.¹ We don't know what letter it was that John is referring to. It may have been 2nd John but this is unlikely if the 1st, 2nd, and 3rd John were all sent by the same courier.

Here we meet the troublemaker **Diotrophes**. He is described as **one who loves to be first among them**. He is most probably one of the elders of the church. He is obviously a dictator in the church. There is no evidence that he is not a genuine Christian. Nor is there any evidence that he has poor doctrine. What is clear is that he is a dictator and he **loves to be first**. It is a sad but common commentary in Church History for a man in leadership to fall into this trap of always wanting his way or always wanting to be "in charge". These men may be orthodox in theology but have brought the worldly lusts of power and pride into the church. As Christ's disciples we are to have a spirit of servant-hood and humility. Attributes **Diotrophes** was clearly lacking. The most stinging problem with **Diotrophes** is described by the words **the one desiring to be first**. The Greek word is *philoproteuo* (literally "loves first place"). The word is only used here in the NT but the root word *proteuo* (literally "first place") is used of Christ in Col. 1:18.

¹⁸ He is also head of the body, the church; and He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so **that He Himself will come to have first place in everything**.

The Lord Jesus Christ has the **first place in the Church**. He is the **head of the body, the church**. **Diotrophes** was attempting to have first place in the church. In other words, Diotrophes was attempting to be the head of the body, the church. This amounts to an attempt to usurp the Lord's position! **Diotrophes** domineering attempt at a *coup de tat* had to be dealt with (v. 10). For this was a serious crime indeed. **Diotrophes'** attempt to usurp the Lord's place in relation to the church becomes a welcome doormat to enter a discussion of Church Government/Polity.

So, this week we will spend the remainder of our time looking at the Historical Development of Church Government and next week we will finish the letter of 3rd John by taking a look at Modern Forms of Church Government.

HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT OF CHURCH GOVERNMENT

The Church was founded by the Lord Jesus Christ Himself on the Day of Pentecost when He and the Father sent the Holy Spirit to baptize believers into the body of Christ. The Church did not begin in the OT. Israel is not the Church. Only Church saints are baptized by the Holy Spirit. OT saints were not baptized by the Holy Spirit. So, Israel and the Church are two distinct peoples in God's plan (Matt 16:18; Acts 1:5; 11:15-17; 1 Cor 12:13; Eph 1:22-23). This Church, founded on the Day of Pentecost will be complete at the pre-tribulation Rapture. The purpose of the Church is to unite all believers into one spiritual body that matures to the full stature of Christ.

1ST CENTURY CHURCH: PLURALITY OF ELDERS AND DEACONS

Acts is a transitional book. It is also the first Church History book and the only Church History book in the 1st century. There are actually seven transitions being made in the Book of Acts. I will only mention one here today; the transition from God's dealings with the nation of Israel to God's dealings with the supra-nation of the Church. The Church is a new entity as I said before. It began with the apostles and grew quickly in Acts 2 with over 3,000 trusting Christ on that same day (Acts 2:41). After this "day after day" the Lord added to their number those who were being saved (Acts 2:47). At this point there was very little organization of the Church. You had the apostles and the believers. The apostles, of course, had apostolic authority. God was gifting each saved individual as He pleased but that was as far as the organization had developed.

OFFICE OF DEACON INTRODUCED

In Acts 6 a need had developed.

Acts 6:2-4 ² So the twelve summoned the congregation of the disciples and said, "It is not desirable for us to neglect the word of God in order to serve tables. ³ "Therefore, brethren, select from among you seven men of good reputation, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we may put in charge of this task. ⁴ "But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word."

At this point we have the introduction of the first formal office in the church: the office of deacon. The office of deacon was reserved for men and it had a very positive result...

Acts 6:7 ⁷ The word of God kept on spreading; and the number of the disciples continued to increase greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests were becoming obedient to the faith.

These seven men took care of the material needs and tasks of the church so the apostles could devote themselves to prayer and teaching the word of God.

OFFICE OF ELDER INTRODUCED

Later in the Book of Acts, we find that elders had been appointed in Jerusalem.

Acts 11:29-30 ²⁹ And in the proportion that any of the disciples had means, each of them determined to send *a contribution* for the relief of the brethren living in Judea. ³⁰ And this they did, sending it in charge of Barnabas and Saul to the **elders**.

These may be the apostles themselves. They may have been acting as the formal **elders** in the early church. But in Acts 14:23 we find that elders were being appointed in other churches outside of Jerusalem. This would extend beyond the apostles. We first find this in the city of Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch in Acts 14:23.

Acts 14:23 ³ When they had appointed **elders** for them in every **church**, having prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord in whom they had believed.

Clearly a need had developed. Clearly, each church had a plurality of elders. “**Elders**” is in the plural here and **church** is in the singular. At this point in Church History the apostles were appointing the elders. This function was later taken over by the mature men in the church as they evaluated a man’s spiritual qualities.

Now turn with me to Acts 20:17. Here I want to show you that in the early church the terms “elder” and “bishop” or “overseer” were equivalent and their job was to “pastor” the church of God.

Acts 20:17 ¹⁷ From Miletus he sent to Ephesus and called to him the **elders** [*presbuteros*] of the church.

Here we have Paul calling the elders [plural] from the church [singular] in Ephesus to meet him at Miletus. Now skip down to Acts 20:28-30. Now he's speaking to these **elders** [plural] from Ephesus.

Acts 20:28-30 ²⁸ "Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers [or bishops ASV; *episkopos*], to shepherd [or pastor; *poimaino*] the church of God which He purchased with His own blood. ²⁹ "I know that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; ³⁰ and **from among your own selves** [from within the elders themselves] men will arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them. [doesn't this sound strikingly like **Diotrephes**. He was an elder and he arose, spoke perverse things and was drawing disciples after himself (3 John 10)!]

It is clear that in the early church, the understanding of the term **elder** was that it referred to the office that a man held. The term for **overseer** or **bishop** referred to this same office and describes their general function, which is to oversee, watch over. The second function mentioned here is the word **to shepherd**. It describes another function of an **elder**. It is the same word for **pastor**. To shepherd means "to pastor". To **pastor** means "to guard, to protect". In the NT the #1 way an **elder** "guards" the flock is by teaching. Jesus said, Peter, do you love me? Yes Lord, I love you...Feed my sheep. So, the **elders** function as undershepherds beneath the Lord Jesus Christ who is the Chief Shepherd!

So, in conclusion, the Book of Acts demonstrates the development in three stages. 1) Originally the church was composed of Christ, the Chief Shepherd, apostles and the saved, all of whom had spiritual gifts. 2) The office of deacon was added in Acts 6 so the apostles could have time to teach the word of God. This was a plurality of deacons in each church. 3) The office of elder was added (Acts 11 and 14) and this too was a plurality of elders in each church. The office of elder was no different than the office of overseer or bishop. They were one and the same office. Their function was "to watch over, to protect, to guard" the sheep and the primary means of doing this was by teaching the word of God.

Importantly, the early NT church knew of no such thing as a hierarchical church. There was not a "clergy"/"laity" distinction although there was always the Shepherds/Flock distinction. Additionally, they knew of no such office as pastor. There were only two offices in the church: deacon and elder. "Pastor" was a gift and a function. "Pastor" is the same Greek word as "shepherd". "Pastoring" and "shepherding" are the same thing and they describe a function of all the elders, not just one man who is supposed to be the "pastor" (1 Pt 5:2). This became the norm for the NT Church. As you study the NT epistles

you will find the exact same thing in every passage mentioning deacons and elders. There are only two offices in the church: elder and deacon. Pastor is not a third office. Pastor is a gift some have but a necessary function of all the elders. There is not one single NT text that supports a single man as its “pastor”. Search as hard as you like you will never find one. There was no such thing as the office of “pastor” in the Bible. “pastoring” is a function of every elder (Acts 20:28; 1 Pt 5:2) and a spiritual gift (Eph. 4:11). Instead, the NT church was ruled by a body of elders who functioned together as equals. There was also a plurality of deacons who helped serve the needs of the church. This was the NT norm and it is supposed to be the norm today.

2ND - 3RD CENTURY CHURCH: MONARCHICAL BISHOP

Now, what happened to the biblical form of Church Government? Well, that’s where 3 John comes in. **Diotrephes** was functioning as one among a plurality of elders as was the norm in the 1st century church. He was not the “pastor” since that office is unknown to the NT. The form of church government was fine in this case but **Diotrephes** was a strong personality who brought the worldly lusts of power, pride, and prestige into the local church. This often happens today when a strong personality sits on an elder board and the rest of the elders tend to be passive.

So, **Diotrephes** is the earliest known example of what developed into the “Monarchical Bishop” (“one over-ruling elder”). That is, one elder who assumed authority over the other elders. During the 2nd century this developed into the creation of a distinction between the bishop and the rest of the elders. The elders were put under the direction of the bishop who held a higher office. Other terms were created in the 3rd century such as “priest”, “clergy”, “laity”, and finally “vicar of Christ” which is an abomination before the Lord.

4TH – 21ST CENTURY CHURCH: ROMAN CATHOLICISM

All of these labels are absolutely foreign to the NT but contributed to the decision of the council of Carthage in 398AD where this hierarchical form of church government was entrenched in the Roman Catholic Church. This hierarchy between the clergy and the laity separated the groups to the point where the clergy became a totally independent Christian society. They didn’t engage in secular business or marriage. That form of church government, known as a Hierarchy dominated the Middle Ages until the time of the Reformation in the early 1500’s. That’s what happens when a problem like **Diotrephes** is not handled. The church moves to a hierarchical form of government and cuts itself off from the people. So, 3rd John is the earliest known example of what ultimately developed

into the entire Hierarchical system embodied in the Roman Catholic Church. Peter was not the first Pope or the first to desire to be a Pope but Diotrephes is the earliest known example of one who did desire to replace Christ on earth by becoming a vicar, Christ's substitute on earth, a Pope. This is blasphemy, blasphemy, blasphemy!!!!!! Yet millions of professing Christians have been put under the domination of a system that lusts after power. That crushes people in order to gain more power and control. In fact the Vatican is formally recognized by the United Nations and is seeking membership and voting rights as a distinct nation.

15TH – 21ST CENTURY CHURCH: 3 MAJOR FORMS GROW OUT OF PROTESTANT REFORMATION

Now, I want to quote to you from the two major Reformers, the German Reformer Martin Luther and the Swiss Reformer John Calvin. And then I'll leave the rest of the historical development of church government until next week. We must ask,

did Luther recognize the dominion of the papacy as a part of the true catholic *universal; my addition*] church? He did not look upon the Pope in the historical and legal light as the legitimate head of the Roman church; but he fought him to the end of his life as the antagonist of the gospel, as the veritable Antichrist, and the papacy as an apostasy.

What about Calvin's views? Calvin

agreed with Luther that the papacy was an invention of the Devil; that the pope was the very Antichrist seated in the temple of God as predicted by Daniel (11:36) and Paul (2 Thess. 2:3), and the beast of the Apocalypse; and he would be soon destroyed by a divine judgment.

Now, needless to say, the two major Reformers had major problems with a Hierarchical form of church government. They were not subtle in pronouncing their views of this system because it has absolutely no support in the NT and it crushes people. So, you can imagine that these men made some serious changes to the form of church government. We'll look at the three forms of church government that came out of the Protestant Reformation next week.

Greek Text 10 dia touto ean eltho upomneso autou ta erga a poiei logois ponerous phluaron emas kai me arkoumenos epi toutois oute autos epidechetai tous adelphous kai tous boulomenous koluei kai ek tes ekklesias ekballei

Translation 10 Because of this, if I come, I will remind him of the works that he is doing, with evil words he accuses us, and not content with these, neither does he receive the brethren and the ones who desire to he prevents and he drives them out of the church.

Now, let's finish verse 10 in brief. John says **For this reason, if I come**. John probably saw that Rome was about to attack Jerusalem. This attack began in 66AD and John was prepared to leave if Rome attacked. If he did leave he would **come** to Asia Minor where this church was. And if he comes John says **I will call attention to his [Diotrephes] deeds**. In other words, John is going to bring this up and deal with it. What are the **deeds of Diotrephes**? They are rejecting the traveling ministers, rejecting messages from the apostles. And not only that, **Diotrephes** resorted to **unjust accusations** of the apostles with **wicked/malicious words**. **And not satisfied with this**. In other words, **Diotrephes** sin nature was eating away at him. His lust for power was so great that he did more than unjustly attack the apostles with wicked words. He went beyond this and he himself **did not receive the** traveling ministers either. And lastly, his power lust was so great that **he forbids those who desire** to help the traveling minister and excommunicates them from the church. He became intolerant of other Christians because he wanted everything his way. He had such a hold on the church that when he was defied he **forcefully drove them out of the church**. All members of the church had to bow to him or else. Now you can see the kind of pressure that **Gaius** was under if he continued to support traveling ministers. You can also see how this kind of behavior leads to a Hierarchical Church Government. So, John gives the next verse to encourage **Gaius** to not bend under the pressure. And **Gaius** stood the test as did Luther and Calvin who stood up to evils of the papacy of Rome.

Next week we will look at the major forms of Church Government that broke forth from the Protestant Reformation and, of course, modern attempts to return to the proper biblical model.

If you are not a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ as your Savior then I have good news for you. The Protestant gospel follows the word of God and teaches a free salvation. You can do nothing to merit salvation. While it is free to you it was not free for Christ. Christ, although perfect in humanity and full deity had to go to the cross and be crucified as a substitute for each and every human being. He merited eternal life for you if only you will believe in Him. That is the sole requirement of enjoying eternal life; belief in Christ.

Believing means to simply place your trust in Jesus Christ and stop trusting your own works. If you are here today and you thirst for eternal life then you may come and partake of the water of eternal life freely.

ⁱ Possibly, according to tradition, this is the church of Pergamum.

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