

The Danger of Preeminence

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INTRODUCTION

- Today we are returning to our study of 3 John
- I would like to invite you to take God’s Word and turn with me to 3 John
- Last week we saw the commendation of Gaius
- There were three things John said about Gaius:
 - He was “beloved” (v.1)
 - He was “walking in truth” (v.3)
 - He was faithful to the brethren and strangers (vv.5-8)
- Today we’re looking at the second person mentioned in this letter
- His name is Diotrophes
- John writes about him in verses 9-11

Listen to what he says...

- Read [3 John 9-11](#)

3 John 9–11 NASB95

⁹ I wrote something to the church; but Diotrophes, 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.

¹¹ Beloved, do not imitate what is evil, but what is good. The one who does good is of God; the one who does evil has not seen God.

- What we have just read should be noted by every believer
- Because what we read is pride at its highest
- It is never good to exalt yourself over others

- The Scripture warns against this kind of behavior:
 - [Proverbs 30:2](#) says it is “foolish”
 - [2 Chronicles 32:26](#) says it brings about God’s “wrath.”

• Why? Because...

- God hates pride - [Proverbs 8:13](#), “The fear of the Lord is to hate evil; Pride and arrogance and the evil way and the perverted mouth, I hate.”
- Pride is what caused Satan to fall - [Isaiah 14:13-15](#), “But you said in your heart, ‘I will ascend to heaven; I will raise my throne above the stars of God, And I will sit on the mount of assembly In the recesses of the north. ‘I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will make myself like the Most High.’ “Nevertheless you will be thrust down to Sheol, To the recesses of the pit.”
- Pride has brought down kings - [Daniel 4:29-37](#), “29 “Twelve months later he was walking on the roof of the royal palace of Babylon. 30 “The king reflected and said, ‘Is this not Babylon the great, which I myself have built as a royal residence by the might of my power and for the glory of my majesty?’ 31 “While the word was in the king’s mouth, a voice came from heaven, saying, ‘King Nebuchadnezzar, to you it is declared: sovereignty has been removed from you, 32 and you will be driven away from mankind, and your dwelling place will be with the beasts of the field. You will be given grass to eat like cattle, and seven periods of time will pass over you until you recognize that the Most High is ruler over the realm of mankind and bestows it on whomever He wishes.’ 33 “Immediately the word concerning Nebuchadnezzar was fulfilled; and he was driven away from mankind and began eating grass like cattle, and his body was drenched with the dew of heaven until his hair had grown like eagles’ feathers and his nails like birds’ claws. 34 “But at the end of that period, I, Nebuchadnezzar, raised my eyes toward heaven and my reason returned to me, and I blessed the Most High and praised and honored Him who lives forever; For His dominion is an everlasting dominion, And His kingdom endures from generation to generation. 35 “All the inhabitants of the earth are accounted as nothing, But He does according to His will in the host of heaven And among the inhabitants of earth; And no one can ward off His hand Or say to Him, ‘What have You done?’ 36 “At that time my reason returned to me. And my majesty and splendor were restored to me for the glory of my kingdom, and my counselors and my nobles began seeking me out; so I was reestablished in my sovereignty, and surpassing greatness was added to me. 37 “Now I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise, exalt and honor the King of heaven, for all His works are true and His ways just, and He is able to humble those who walk in pride.””
- [Psalm 75:5](#), “Do not lift up your horn on high, Do not speak with insolent pride.’ ”

The MacArthur Study Bible Chapter 75

Lifting up the horn apparently described a stubborn animal who kept itself from entering a yoke by holding its head up as high as possible. The phrase thus symbolized insolence or rebellion.

> Rather we are to...

- [Mark 12:31](#), “The second is this, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no other commandment greater than these.””

· When we compare Gaius to Diotrefes, we see a great...

LESSON

I. The Contrast (vv.9-10)

1, 2, 3 John: MacArthur New Testament Commentary Diotrefes' Personal Ambition

Gaius was graciously hospitable, Diotrefes ungraciously inhospitable. Gaius loved the truth and loved everyone humbly (vv. 3–6); Diotrefes refused the truth and loved himself, and threatened everyone from his position of self-appointed authority in the church. One submitted to the words of truth; the other spouted words of contempt. The difference between the two men was not primarily doctrinal but behavioral; John did not rebuke Diotrefes for heresy, but for haughtiness.

· John said in verse 9...

- Diotrefes Elevates Himself (v.9)

John writes, “I wrote something to the church; but Diotrefes, who loves to be first among them, does not accept what we say.”

> John first...

- He wrote to the church about this but this letter was lost
 - Maybe Diotrefes destroyed it [or]
 - He never read it

> John said the reason is because Diotrefes...

- He “loves to be first”
- The Greek word for this phrase is *philoproteuon* (pres.act.part.) which means, “to love or desire to be first or chief” (Mounce)
- This is a compound Greek word composed of two Greek words: *philos* (“love”) and *protos* (“first”)
- In this context it describes a person who is selfish, self-centered, and self-seeking (MacArthur)
- *Proteuo* appears in the NT only in [Colossians 1:18](#), where it refers to the preeminence of the Lord Jesus Christ
- With the use of the present tense, it tells us this was an ongoing attitude that Diotrefes had

- What Diotrephes needed was the same attitude John the Baptist had in [John 3:30](#) where he said, “He must increase, but I must decrease.”

· **J. Vernon McGee said...**

Thru the Bible with J. Vernon McGee Diotrephes—A Dictator

Diotrephes is a man who puts on airs. He is pretentious. He is vainglorious. He struts around as a peacock. He has an overweening ambition. He is puffed up, inflated like a balloon. He is one whom you have to receive with a flourish of trumpets. He comes in in a blaze of glory

- We are told in Scripture not to be selfish, self-centered, and self-seeking
 - [Philippians 2:3](#), “Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves”

› **Lenski says...**

The Interpretation of St. Paul’s Epistles to the Galatians, to the Ephesians, and to the Philippians
Paul’s Second Admonition: With a Mind like Christ’s Humbly to Relinquish What Is Ours by Right in the Interest of the Brethren

“self-seeking” refers to what the selfish are after and “vainglory” to what they get when they succeed, a lot of glory that is entirely κενός, “empty,” hollow. Yes, this “self-seeking” is minding a certain thing, and the thing is “empty glory” when it is achieved.

- This is what the Pharisees did in [Matthew 6:1-2, 5](#), “1 Beware of practicing your righteousness before men to be noticed by them; otherwise you have no reward with your Father who is in heaven. 2 “So when you give to the poor, do not sound a trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, so that they may be honored by men. Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full.” 5 “When you pray, you are not to be like the hypocrites; for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and on the street corners so that they may be seen by men. Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full.”
 - Their reward is that they were seen by men (MacArthur) and the reputation they gain while on earth (MacDonald)
- James said in [James 3:16](#), “For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there is disorder and every evil thing.”

The Reformation Study Bible: English Standard Version (2015 Edition) Chapter 3

As James earlier showed that the tongue is capable of creating disastrous evil, so here he emphasizes the destructive power of envy and selfish ambition. From them flow all kinds of evil, including vandalism, murder, adultery, warfare, theft, slander, and other sins that violate people and provoke chaos in the community.

· **Everything John says from this point in vv.9-11 is the result of pride, loving “to be first among them.”**

· **At the end of verse 9, John also says Diotrephes...**

- He Does Not Accept What We Say (v.9b)

- The word “accept” (epidechomai, pres. mid. or pass. ind.) is translated “receive” in verse 10
- His desire for power and self-glory had driven him to reject the authority of Christ mediated through the apostle John (MacArthur)
- Diotresphes was “lording...over” the brethren ([1 Pet.5:3](#))
- Jesus said in [John 13:20](#), “Truly, truly, I say to you, he who receives whomever I send receives Me; and he who receives Me receives Him who sent Me.””
- In [Matthew 10:40-42](#), Jesus further said, “41 He who receives a prophet in the name of a prophet shall receive a prophet’s reward; and he who receives a righteous man in the name of a righteous man shall receive a righteous man’s reward. 42 “And whoever in the name of a disciple gives to one of these little ones even a cup of cold water to drink, truly I say to you, he shall not lose his reward.””
 - Welcoming Christ’s emissaries is tantamount to welcoming Him (MacArthur)
 - [A.T. Pierson](#) said “The Jews regarded the reward of the prophet as the greatest...if you do no more than receive a prophet in the capacity of prophet, the same reward that is given to the prophet will be given to you, if you help the prophet along.”
- In verse 10, John gives a list of vices Diotresphes is guilty of, all as a result of pride...desiring to be preeminent
- John says “for this reason, if I come, I will call attention to his deeds which he does...”

1, 2, 3 John: MacArthur New Testament Commentary Diotresphes’ Perverted Actions

John would not overlook this challenge to his apostolic authority and to Christ’s rule in the church. He would expose Diotresphes before the congregation, make his conduct a matter of church discipline (1 Tim. 5:19–20), and, if need be, use his apostolic authority to deal with him.

· This is not all he was doing...

- He Unjustly Accuses with Wicked Words (v.10a)
 - This is character assassination which is a common ploy of those who seek to elevate themselves (MacArthur)
 - The words “unjustly accusing” (phluareo, pres.act.part.) appears only here in NT
 - A related Greek word is translated “gossips” (phluaros) in [1 Timothy 5:13](#), “At the same time they also learn to be idle, as they go around from house to house; and not merely idle, but also gossips and busybodies, talking about things not proper to mention.”
 - Scripture repeatedly condemns gossip:
 - [Proverbs 20:19](#), “He who goes about as a slanderer reveals secrets, Therefore do not associate with a gossip.”
 - Those whom God gave over to a debased mind in [Romans 1:29](#), are “being filled with all unrighteousness, wickedness, greed, evil; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, malice;

they are gossips”

• Scripture also condemns slander:

- [Leviticus 19:16](#), ““You shall not go about as a slanderer among your people, and you are not to act against the life of your neighbor; I am the Lord.”
- [Psalm 101:5](#), “Whoever secretly slanders his neighbor, him I will destroy; No one who has a haughty look and an arrogant heart will I endure.”

› Peter says in...

- [1 Peter 2:1](#), “Therefore, putting aside all malice and all deceit and hypocrisy and envy and all slander”
- The adjective translated “wicked” (poneros) is used 5 times in 1 John (2:13, 14; 3:12; 5:18, 19) and once of Cain’s evil deeds (3:12)
- In [2 John 11](#), it is used to describe the evil deeds of the false teachers

1, 2, 3 John: MacArthur New Testament Commentary Diotrephes’ Perverted Actions

Diotrephes’ malicious accusations were evil, false, and slanderous. He saw John as a threat to his power and prestige in the church and savagely attacked him.

• Not satisfied with assaulting John...

• He Refuses to Give Hospitality to Brothers (v.10)

“And not satisfied with this, he himself does not receive the brethren, either”

- The “brethren” are the traveling preachers who proclaimed the apostolic message of the gospel
- Seeing the preachers as a threat to his own power in the church, Diotrephes refused to extend hospitality to them
- As we said this is “lording over the flock” as well as micro managing them
- Scripture commands hospitality because it addresses our selfishness and it reveals the heart of God
- God cares about those in need as so should we
 - [Psalm 68:5](#), God is “A father of the fatherless and a judge for the widows, Is God in His holy habitation.”
 - [Psalm 146:9](#), “The Lord protects the strangers; He supports the fatherless and the widow, But He thwarts the way of the wicked.”

› Because of this...

- [Romans 12:13](#), says we are to “contribut[e] to the needs of the saints, [and] practic[e] hospitality.”

> We are not as...

- [Hebrews 13:2](#), “Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by this some have entertained angels without knowing it.”

> That’s why Peter says...

- [1 Peter 4:9](#), “Be hospitable to one another without complaint.”

- In Peter’s day, love included opening one’s home and caring for other needy Christians, such as traveling preachers. It also included opening one’s home for church services (MacArthur)

- John said Gaius was doing this and therefore “walking in truth” (v.3). He was obedient to God’s command to be hospitable
- Diotresphes was not doing this and was guilty of rejecting the Word of God

1, 2, 3 John: MacArthur New Testament Commentary Diotresphes’ Perverted Actions

Not only are Diotresphes’ words vicious; his deeds are equally reprehensible. He willfully breaks the rules of Christian hospitality by refusing to receive missionaries sent out to proclaim the gospel. By denying them shelter and food, he hinders the progress of the Word of God. In brief, Diotresphes is thwarting God’s plans and purposes and consequently he faces divine wrath. (Simon J. Kistemaker, III John, New Testament Commentary [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1986], 9–10)

· Not only is he refusing to show hospitality to brothers but...

- He Stops and Removes Those who Offer Hospitality (v.10)

John says, “and he forbids those who desire to do so and puts them out of the church.”

- This was a further abuse of power
- He was obstructing and preventing others in the church from showing hospitality to the itinerant preachers
- Those who defied him and showed hospitality were put out of the church

1, 2, 3 John: MacArthur New Testament Commentary Diotresphes’ Perverted Actions

So threatening was Diotresphes that he had the clout to excommunicate anyone he perceived as an apparent threat. Perhaps that had actually happened to Gaius, which could explain why John had to tell him about what was going on in the church. If he was still in the church, Gaius was facing hostility and opposition from Diotresphes, prompting John to encourage him not to give in, but to continue to show hospitality in the future

1, 2, 3 John: MacArthur New Testament Commentary Diotresphes’ Perverted Actions

Like most conflicts in the church, this one stemmed from pride. It was pride that caused Diotresphes to slander John, snub the missionaries, and eliminate those who defied him. His arrogance led to ambition, which resulted in false, slanderous accusations, defiance toward apostolic authority, and the crushing of any opposition to his power. Sadly, there have always

been people like Diotrephes in churches. Even more tragically, many churches, either because they are fearful of them, or in the name of tolerance, refuse to deal with their own Diotrephes types. The apostle John, however, had no hesitation in confronting such a sinner for the good of the church and the honor of Christ.

· John concludes in verse 11 with...

II. The Command (v.11)

- Do Not Imitate What is Evil (v.11a)
 - What Diotrephes was doing was “evil”
 - John did not want Gaius or Demetrius to “imitate” Diotrephes
 - This is where we find the command in the word “imitate” (mimeomai, pres.imp.)
 - We are to follow those whose life is a habitual pattern of “good”
 - [Hebrews 13:7](#), “Remember those who led you, who spoke the word of God to you; and considering the result of their conduct, imitate their faith.”
 - Paul said in [1 Corinthians 4:16](#), “Therefore I exhort you, be imitators of me.”
 - He said it again in [1 Corinthians 11:1](#), and adds the qualifier: “Be imitators of me, just as I also am of Christ.”

› Diotrephes shows us what is evil while Gaius and Demetrius what is good, therefore...

The Reformation Study Bible: English Standard Version (2015 Edition) Outline of 3 John
Tyranny like that of Diotrephes reflects the opposite of the love of God; the temptation to respond in kind must be resisted.

- Imitate What is Good (v.11b)
 - Jesus said in [Matthew 7:18](#), “A good tree cannot produce bad fruit, nor can a bad tree produce good fruit.”
 - Diotrephes was “bad fruit”

› John draws this same conclusion at the end of verse 11...

- The One Who Does Good is of God (v.11c)
 - This is what John said in [1 John 2:29](#), “If you know that He is righteous, you know that everyone also who practices righteousness is born of Him.”
 - He said it again in [1 John 3:6-9](#), “6 No one who abides in Him sins; no one who sins has seen Him or knows Him. 7 Little children, make sure no one deceives you; the one who practices righteousness is righteous, just as He is righteous; 8 the one who practices sin is of the devil; for the devil has sinned from the beginning. The Son of God appeared for this purpose, to destroy the works of the devil. 9 No one who is born

of God practices sin, because His seed abides in him; and he cannot sin, because he is born of God.”

› So John says at the end of verse 11...

- The One Who Does Evil Has Not Seen God (v.11d)
 - John said in [John 3:20](#), “For everyone who does evil hates the Light, and does not come to the Light for fear that his deeds will be exposed.”
 - John’s statement in verse 11 indicates that Diotrefes’ actions proved that he was never a Christian (MacArthur)

› Adam Clarke said...

The Holy Bible with a Commentary and Critical Notes, Vols. I–VI 3 John

He who is unfeeling, unmerciful, unkind, hath not seen God—has no proper knowledge of that God whose NAME is mercy, and whose NATURE is love.

CONCLUSION

- I realize that what John is saying in this text may be referring to you
- Not that you have put anyone out of the church that is showing hospitality or that you have refused to show hospitality
- But it falls under the general heading of unrighteousness
- Things you follow or do demonstrate either righteousness or unrighteousness in your life and your lack of Christ or your relationship to Him
- For this I call you to repent and turn to Christ
- Confess your wicked heart to Him
- Acknowledge His perfect work for you on the cross and confess Him as Lord
- For those who are saved, continue to imitate what is righteous because “the one who does good is of God, the one who does evil has not seen God” (v.11)