

The Faithlessness of the Prideful

3 John 1:9-14

Well this is a tough passage this morning. It's very negative. This morning we see the truth that all Scripture is inspired and is good for teaching but also for rebuking, reproof and training in righteousness.

This morning as we look at Diotrephes, we see a stark contrast between him and Gaius.

Let's read the entire letter.

1 The elder to the beloved Gaius, whom I love in truth.

2 Beloved, I pray that all may go well with you and that you may be in good health, as it goes well with your soul. 3 For I rejoiced greatly when the brothers came and testified to your truth, as indeed you are walking in the truth. 4 I have no greater joy than to hear that my children are walking in the truth.

5 Beloved, it is a faithful thing you do in all your efforts for these brothers, strangers as they are, 6 who testified to your love before the church. You will do well to send them on their journey in a manner worthy of God. 7 For they have gone out for the sake of the name, accepting nothing from the Gentiles. 8 Therefore we ought to support people like these, that we may be fellow workers for the truth.

9 I have written something to the church, but Diotrephes, who likes to put himself first, does not acknowledge our authority. 10 So if I come, I will bring up what he is doing, talking wicked nonsense against us. And not content with that, he refuses to welcome the brothers, and also stops those who want to and puts them out of the church.

11 Beloved, do not imitate evil but imitate good. Whoever does good is from God; whoever does evil has not seen God. 12 Demetrius has received a good testimony from everyone, and from the truth itself. We also add our testimony, and you know that our testimony is true.

13 I had much to write to you, but I would rather not write with pen and ink. 14 I hope to see you soon, and we will talk face to face.

15 Peace be to you. The friends greet you. Greet the friends, each by name.

Diotrephes was a very proud man. He was so proud that in seeking his place of preeminence, he was actually busy usurping Christ in the local church.

What do I mean by that? By rejecting those who were serving Christ he was, in fact, rejecting Jesus.

People like Diotrephes are common in many churches today. You may know one. Usually someone who has been at a church for a long time. He or she has seen many leaders and pastors come and go. In fact – he or she may have been instrumental in running a pastor or two out of the church. They are matriarchs or patriarchs of the church. They may be founding members. They may not even be official church leaders.

We see in verse nine that John had written a letter to the church, not to Diotrephes himself, but to the church. But we learn that Diotrephes wasn't interested. He really didn't want to hear anything the apostle John had to say. In fact, many commentators believe that Diotrephes actually intercepted the letter and did not read it to the church at all, possibly destroying it.

And Diotrephes problem, with John, was not necessarily a theological problem. And his problem was not necessarily between two different belief systems. The problem is not a problem of belief, it is a problem of behavior. It is a moral problem. Diotrephes is demonstrating the classic problem identified by Paul in Romans 12 when he writes, "Let no one believe more highly of himself than he ought." Diotrephes got this wrong. He refuses to see himself in the light of God. The conflict is not doctrinal, it's not theological, it's not a spiritual issue; it is a personal issue of loving oneself.

In the opening eight verses, we saw Gaius, the man who gave hospitality. In verses 9 and 10 we see Diotrephes, the man who refused to give hospitality.

As graciously hospitable as Gaius was, Diotrephes was equally ungracious and inhospitable. They are poles apart, they are absolute opposites.

Gaius is seen knowing truth, walking in truth, loving the brethren, entertaining strangers who are faithful ministers of the gospel. Diotrephes is seen loving himself, refusing to allow anyone to come in who might somehow receive the respect, the love, the affection, the response of the congregation which he wants for himself.

Diotrephes had managed to move himself into a position of power and became the screener for anything and everything that came to the church, literally rejecting the Apostle John. John says, "Diotrephes does not accept what we say." He rejects apostolic authority because of his pride. Apostolic authority is the foundation of the church – it is what the apostle's wrote. If we are going to be a foundationally solid church, we must – and do – accept what the Bible says.

This rejection is a pattern for Diotrophes. This is habitual for him. He's driven by personal ambition, this is so hard to deal with in the church, particularly in small congregations where these people are entrenched.

And John writes six things that he does that characterize Diotrophes. Look with me, starting at verse 9:

- He puts himself first
- He does not acknowledge the apostolic authority of John
- He speaks wickedly, senselessly and maliciously against John
- He refuses to welcome the brothers
- He stops others who want to do this good thing. Gaius must have infuriated Diotrophes.
- He puts people out of the church that disagree with him – those who care. In other words – since he couldn't stop some folk from practicing the love of Christ, he just kicked them out. He couldn't love the loyal believers because he wanted the preeminence.

What a terrific example!

Not only was he perverted by ambition, but it led to perverted action, verse 10, "So if I come, I will bring up what he is doing" It's not just an attitude. You can't contain an attitude anyway, attitudes becomes actions.

So John simply tells Gaius he will bring this up in the church when he comes. And before you ask – I do not think this is church discipline on John's part. If it is, John has done it all wrong based on Matthew 18. No, John is bringing this up publically because it is happening publically. Everyone in the church probably knows it is happening.

And oh, by the way, this is another reason that we have a plurality of elders at Clearcreek Chapel. No one-man has the power to do anything like this without the agreement of the others.

Only the **church** has the right to put someone out of the church. This is not a right Jesus gives any one man in Matthew 18. **It is the responsibility and authority of the church.**

Does that mean we can't trust our leaders? No, not at all. I have worked on boards with and without elders in churches for many years, and the men that sit as elders among you, are as fine, and as godly men is I have ever met. But we ARE men.

It is interesting that many pastors around the country are some of the most insecure people you will ever meet.

- They take their calling with great soberness.

- They are concerned about wolves coming into the flock and destroying the sheep.
- They are concerned with their own ability to properly teach and preach the Scriptures.
- They are concerned with her own ability to handle church finances and administration.

And so it becomes easy for these men to make decisions based on fear rather than trust and truth. These men are not like Diotrephes, but sometimes the result is similar.

And this is why, John's warnings here apply to us. It is because the heart of man is desperately wicked. And we too must be careful to not imitate evil but imitate good.

Diotrephes slandered John, cold-shouldered the preachers of the gospel, excommunicated the loyal and the faithful from the church all because he loved the preeminence and wanted to stand alone at the top of the heap.

Maybe Gaius had fallen victim to that whole thing. Maybe Gaius had just literally been either put out of the church or crushed in his efforts to show hospitality and that's why John says you must support such men. But it may be well that he actually had been put out of the church and didn't exactly know what was going on.

There's a third character in this book by the name of Demetrius. And if Gaius showed hospitality and needed to continue to do it, no matter what pressure might be coming, and if Diotrephes was the man who refused to give hospitality, Demetrius is one who is to receive hospitality.

Verses 11-12

Beloved, do not imitate evil but imitate good. Whoever does good is from God; whoever does evil has not seen God. 12 Demetrius has received a good testimony from everyone, and from the truth itself. We also add our testimony, and you know that our testimony is true.

He's introducing him to this man, Demetrius, one of the faithful men who go out for the sake of the name, back in verses 7 and 8. You need to welcome him to be a fellow worker of the truth, in spite of the fact that there's Diotrephes in the church.

I wonder if Demetrius could have been the bearer of this letter. Demetrius had:

- A good testimony from others
- Knew, loved, and walked in the truth
- Received a good testimony from John
- John's testimony is true – in fact – because this letter is Scripture, it is also the testimony of Christ.

Demetrius is much like Gaius isn't he. John commended Demetrius for similar things as he commended Gaius. They both have stellar reputations. They are somewhat bookends surrounding Diotrephes.

And if you will receive him, you will not be imitating what is evil, but what is good. You will then give more evidence that you are of God.

The person who does good is of God, the person who does evil is not of God. The person who does righteousness is of God. The person who sins is not of God. To do good is evidence of divine birth, for you're ordained unto good works. So imitate those who do good.

How do you know a man's worth?

- What does everybody say about him?
- How does his life match up with Scripture?
- And what do Christian leaders say about him?

Three great truths stand out and I'll close.

1. Verse 3, know the truth and walk in it.
2. Second, be hospitable to others who preach the truth.
3. Third principle, pattern your life after godly examples. And then there will be peace in the church and God will be glorified in His church.

CONCLUSION

As we ponder application of our lives, I want us to take a little different look at Diotrephes.

Before we judge Diotrephes too harshly, I want us to remove the log from our own eye. Why, because Diotrephes may be a description of us. We all, in some sense, want to be preeminent in our own lives. Do you want to be first? Yes, many times we do.

Jonathan Edwards once said, "the heart of a man is exceedingly prone to undo and sinful anger, being naturally full of pride and selfishness."

But God makes it clear that there is only one who is preeminent – Jesus. And if Diotrephes is **truly** a believer, he may be miserable living like this in the church.

We fight so hard to do what we want to do. And many of you are miserable because of it. You have turmoil, you can't rest. You don't have peace. Some of you are here today and you don't feel great about being in Church. You don't like the singing and you feel weird when I read Scripture. In your life there is turmoil – and it is a good thing – but still it makes you sick. Then you go to your sin and try to enjoy sinning but you can't enjoy that either because God is with you.

And wherever you are you feel miserable:

- When you are at church with God you feel miserable – because sin is with you.
- When you are in your sin you feel miserable – because God is with you.

Wherever you are you can't find joy anywhere – because you are trying to mix the two – but you have a new master living inside of you.

I brought some lemonade. Do you like lemonade?

I also brought chocolate milk.

I enjoy the taste of chocolate milk. I enjoy the taste of lemonade.

And this is like a lot of Christians. We really like God (sip chocolate milk) and I really like to sin (sip lemonade).

I like God ...I love my sin.

You wake up in the morning and say, "Oh God, I really love you and want to glorify you today with my life (sip chocolate milk)

Then you smoke pot (sip lemonade).

I'm sorry God, I really want to read your Word. I'm going to really get into it (sip chocolate milk)

OH – the new Victoria Secret catalogue just came in the mail (sip lemonade).

God I want to glorify you with my body (sip chocolate milk)

And then we participate in pornography or other sexual sin (sip lemonade).

We go back and forth and back and forth – and then wonder why we feel sick.

Is is the perfect picture of your life? You will never feel at peace until you understand, accept, and submit to the one who has the true preeminence in the world. It is that Name, the name of Jesus.

Some of you are looking at me like I am some kind of nut. You have never surrendered yourself to Jesus. You have never repented of your sins and asked God to forgive you through Jesus Christ. And, frankly, you don't know how.

All around the church building this morning are men and women who would love to answer that question for you. These folk have lanyards around their necks and they would love to answer your questions and pray with you.

Others of you have been sipping lemonade and chocolate milk together and are simply sick to your stomach because you have allowed sin and desires to have the preeminence over Jesus.

There are people all around the church who would love to pray with you as well. And if you can't find someone with a lanyard, ask your ABE teacher, or your child's nursery worker or children's teacher, or the person at the end of the hall manning the bookstore. And if you can't find one of them, ask the man or women sitting in your row with you.

Who is this Name?

He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together. And he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent. For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross.

And you, who once were alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, he has now reconciled in his body of flesh by his death, in order to present you holy and blameless and above reproach before him, if indeed you continue in the faith, stable and steadfast, not shifting from the hope of the gospel that you heard, which has been proclaimed in all creation under heaven... (Colossians 1:15-21)