

Text: 3 John 9-12

Title: Diotrephes and Demetrius

Truth: Imitate what is good.

Date/Location: Sunday August 17, 2019 at FBC

Introduction

John the Apostle is writing to Gaius. This man is well-loved in the Christian community and John himself deeply appreciates him. Gaius was a man who had truth and love. His walk with the Lord was obvious, his faith had feet to it, and this showed that he really believed it. As commentator Burdick suggests, truth that is not practiced is truth that is not really believed. Gaius really believed in Christ. His love was practical in that it helped God's servants. In fact, he would even house itinerant ministers that he did not know. John asks him to continue doing this and be a partner in the truth.

The way Gaius helped God's servants on their journeys shows us how the Great Commission was supported in the early church. There were no formal mission agencies such as have been established today. The monthly support model that we use is easy because we can move money very easily from place to place, and because we are quite prosperous. Maybe that was not the case in the first century. Back then, the way that churches supported missionaries was to receive them, and house them, and send them on their way with finances that would help them on the next leg of their work. Imagine that for the missionary, this was a real "faith mission." If they went somewhere and no one received or help them, times were going to be very lean.

I. Diotrephes, v. 9-10

Unfortunately, there was a man in the church where Gaius was who did not want to receive such ministers of God's word. Even worse, he did not want John to have any influence on "his" church, and was so domineering that he would work against people in the church who wanted to do the right thing.

A. The Attitude. Diotrephes "loves to have the preeminence among them." This is plain-old pride. It is self-worship. Who is to have preeminence in the church? Only Jesus Christ—Col. 1:15-19. Not the pastor, not another leader, not a prominent person in the community or a rich person. Christ *alone*. Diotrephes was the exact opposite of what our Lord taught in Matthew 20:25-28. He had fallen into the sin of Satan (1 Tim. 3:6, Isaiah 14:14). He wants to be his own authority. He defies outside authority.

B. The Actions. There is a laundry list:

1. He did not receive us. John had written to the church but apparently Diotrephes refused to read the letter in the church. This is criminal. We have no idea what John wrote. Some have speculated that this refers to 1 John or 2 John, but there is no sure evidence for this.
2. He spreads malicious nonsense. The NKJV has “prating” but this is a very uncommon English word, so it is not a good translation. It refers to talking foolishly or emptily or at great length. What he is saying about John is devoid of truth. But worse than that, it is wicked talk. He is lying, speaking gossip with evil intent.
3. He does not receive the brothers. His pride is doing harm to others. In this case, it is the brothers sent by John who are harmed. They are not receiving needed support for their ministry. But also, the church is robbed of the blessing of supporting missionaries.
4. He forbids the church from receiving the brothers. He won’t let the church house them or support them.
5. He excommunicates those who want to defy him in order to obey Christ. He orders others *not* to do good, under the pain of removal from the church. This sounds a whole lot more like a godless synagogue (John 9:34) than the leadership of a loving church.

All this indicates that Diotrephes hates John, rejects apostolic teaching, and defies all authority but his own. He wants first place for himself, higher than John, and higher even than Christ. Otherwise, he would have received Christ’s specially appointed messenger John.

- ## C. The Repercussions. Verse 10 says that when John comes (we’ll assume he would make it at some point), he would deal with the situation. The man would have to face the consequences of his behavior. “Calling to mind” does not mean simply “reminding” other people. It means to openly deal with it, to “bring it to light.” This would be serious, but perhaps not as serious as an earlier technique that John had contemplated (Luke 9:54)!
1. John is not interested in just getting rid of the guy. Although if Diotrephes keeps it up, he does need to go. No church needs that kind of pastor. John wants to restore the situation to what it should be.
 2. John would do what Paul taught in 1 Timothy 5:20—rebuke this elder in the presence of the church, as a corrective, and as a deterrent to similar behavior in the future. The shame of being called out should hopefully be healthy for him.

3. If that fails, Romans 14:12 is in the future of this prideful man.

II. The Hinge Point, v. 11

The most directly applicable verse of this section for us is verse 11. It contains a command and an explanation.

- A. The command: Do not imitate what is evil, but what is good. Since this is sandwiched between Diotrefes and Demetrius, we cannot miss the evil example and the excellent example that John presents to us.
- B. The explanation is given in a two-fold proverbial format: He who does good is of God, but he who does evil has not seen God. To put it more bluntly, if you imitate good, that is a good indication you are saved. But if you imitate evil, that is because you *are* evil and not saved. The doing of good indicates that you have previously “seen” God.
1. This seeing is not physical sight of the form of God. Some people *have* seen a partial appearance of God or a preincarnate appearance of Christ, particularly in the Old Testament (Genesis 32:30, Judges 13:22) or in the apocalyptic material of the New Testament (Revelation 4-5). To Job it was revealed that he would see God in a resurrected body (Job 19:26). No one has seen God in His fullness (because it is too dangerous; John 1:18, 1 John 4:12). But Jesus Christ is God and has revealed God. Seeing Christ is in effect to see God (John 14:8-11). God’s people will see God face to face in the eternal future (Matthew 5:8, Rev. 22:4).
 2. The “seeing” to which John refers is apprehending God by faith and thus experiencing salvation from sin.¹ The “sight” of God today is a faith-sight (2 Cor. 5:7). We see God by understanding the Bible; by knowing Christ through what we are told in Scripture; and by the enlivening work of the Holy Spirit. We see God when our eyes are opened to the truth about our own pride, selfishness, idolatry, covetousness, lack of contentment, and the like sins. We see God when we understand who Jesus Christ is and what He has done, including His resurrection from the dead. When the notion of eternity in us (Eccl. 3:11) is combined with the knowledge of judgment for sin

¹ A helpful expression of truth which I heard within the last week or so: (1) Many people understand Christian salvation to be deliverance from the *punishment for sin*. But that is not complete. We must also understand that (2) Christian salvation is deliverance from *sin itself*. You can’t be delivered from (1) the punishment without also being delivered from (2) the enslavement and habitual practice of sin. The first is a form of easy-believism and is not a true gospel. The second is what the New Testament teaches.

and life available through belief in Christ (John 3:18, 3:36), then we can truly see God through Jesus Christ. We must believe that God exists in order to please Him (Heb. 11:6) and beyond that, we must believe that God is displeased with sin and will not have any of it in His presence. We *need* to see God, but there are forces trying to blind us (2 Cor. 4:4). Our eyes need opening to be able to see (Acts 26:18).

- C. Application: Get as many good Christians in front of your eyes as you can. Spend time with good people. Read about good people (Christian biographies). Be in church with good people as much as you possibly can. And then follow those examples. Emulate them.

III. Demetrius, v. 12

We don't know much about this man Demetrius. He may have been the man who carried John's letter to Gaius, but we cannot assert that with any level of certainty. What we do know, however, is enough to be a blessing and a lesson for us how to live, in contrast with Diotrephes.

- A. Notice the vast differences between these men in this letter:

Diotrephes	Demetrius and Gaius
Full of pride	D: Has a good testimony from all
Rejected apostolic teaching	D: Had a good testimony from the apostle John
Doesn't receive the brothers	G: Receives even strangers
Dominates the church	G: A beloved brother

- B. Demetrius has a good testimony. It is interesting that this verb is perfect passive. The perfect tense indicates that this was a long-standing situation in his life. Something (someone!) once transformed him, and then the effects of that transformation stood out ever after. The passive voice of the verb indicates that he did not seek or promote his own reputation, but he came by it honestly from three outside directions:

1. From all – lots of people were able to testify of his excellent Christian conduct. And that is what testimony is—the ability to confirm or attest to something based on personal knowledge.
2. From the truth itself. His life matched what the Christian faith teaches.
3. From the apostle John. This is a real cherry on top for Demetrius. Gaius, the first reader of this letter, knew John personally and was absolutely certain of John's reliability in this and all matters.

Conclusion

Do good, like Gaius and Demetrius. Don't be like Diotrephes.

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