

## Series: The Confident, Loving Church – week 29

**CDOBC – beginning on 2/14/10**

Title: **“Opposing the Truth”**

*3 John 9-14 (some translations vs. 15) ~ October 10, 2010*

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**OBJECTIVE:** To identify bad / evil leadership and to encourage the church to imitate good, Godly examples who follow the example of Christ.

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### Announcements

- Welcome / guests – communication cards
- Fall Festival sign-ups begin today in courtyard
- Welcome Class – Oct. 13
- RHOF – new members 10/24
- Richard Deal – Piano Concert 10/16
- Ministry Fair – 10/17

Ministry testimonies: 1<sup>st</sup>: Jessica Lukic 2<sup>nd</sup>: Patty McBride

I’m always amazed that God has chosen to use us – redeemed sinners – to be His ambassadors to the world. In His wisdom and providence, He has determined that He is glorified the most when imperfect and broken believers testify to our perfect and complete God and Savior.

God knew the challenges His Church would face in this area – especially in the area of church leadership. So, in 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1, we have specific qualifications that church leaders must match up with. This certainly does not guarantee spotless leaders who are righteous and holy in all things – but it sets the standard that we must strive for and admonish when the standard is not met. But since God has chosen to use “pots of clay” as His ambassadors, we see all throughout the Scriptures leaders over God’s people making terrible mistakes. Sometimes these were simply foolish decisions; and many times the problems were a direct result of blatant sin.

The sin of pride was one of the most pervasive sins among leaders, and when a prideful and arrogant leader is in charge in a church,

there is a great deal of carnage that the body suffers. One of the reasons the sin of pride is so dangerous to the church is because the leader is more interested in themselves and their own position and power than the health and welfare of the church.

The sin of pride leads the list of the things that are abominations to God (Prov. 6:16-17a).

The sin of pride is identified as the first sin in all of creation – as Satan attempted a heavenly coup and tried to place himself above God (Isaiah 14:12-14).

In contrast to Satan’s sin – and the sin of so many other leaders throughout history, Jesus stands as the model of what church leaders should be like. “Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death-- even death on a cross!” Phil. 2:5-8

In God’s economy – He exalts those who serve – and humbles those who are prideful and demanding – those who ‘lord over’ the people they are supposed to be serving.

“Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.” Phil. 2:9-11

Throughout the letters of 1 & 2 John, the Apostle has battled against the false teaching that had infiltrated some of the churches – and he instructed the readers to believe in and devote themselves to the truth of Christ. Now, in 3 John, the Apostle is not confronting false teaching, but corrupt and sinful leadership.

Turn to 3 John 9-14

**Dangerous and harmful leadership vs. 9-10**

At some point in the past, the Apostle John had written a letter to the church that Diotrophes was in charge of, but it seems that the letter was never passed on and read to the congregants of that church.

NIV – “will have nothing to do with us.”

KJV – “receiveth us not.”

NASB – “does not accept what we say.”

ESV – “does not acknowledge our authority.”

It's not clear what happened to the letter that was written. Some think Diotrophes refused to accept the letter, or if he accepted the letter but discredited the Apostle John somehow in the eyes of his church, or if he destroyed the letter. We don't have the letter and we're not sure of what it said – but it's content and the authority of the author was rejected and kept from the church. It seems that the only thing John knows is that Diotrophes opposes him and he even opposes the ministry of the traveling missionaries / preachers.

Now, remember, this short letter (3 John) was written to Gaius – a “beloved” friend of the Apostle due to Gaius' commitment to the truth, and his valued ministry of hospitality to the traveling missionaries.

The identification of “the church” is also interesting as we try to paint the picture of what had been going here. It seems clear that “the church” was where Diotrophes was in charge – probably a self-appointed leader. What is unclear is Gaius' connection with this church. It doesn't seem likely that he is a part of the church since the Apostle uses the 3<sup>rd</sup> person (“...puts **them** out of the church.”) – which seems to isolate Gaius from being part of the church. However, some have proposed that Gaius was one of those who had been excommunicated from the church – which is not completely unreasonable – but this is not a dominant view. Others think that Gaius was a member of another church in a nearby city /

town, and that some of the traveling missionaries he had welcomed into his home, had been rejected by Diotrephes' church and John was trying to let Gaius know what was happening and to encourage him to continue in his work, even if Diotrephes tried to tell him otherwise.

So what was the problem between the Apostle John and Diotrephes? It's not doctrinal or theological...the issue of false teachers doesn't come up in this letter. John identifies the problem in vs. 9 – that Diotrephes “...loves to be first...”.

John uses a compound Greek word here *philōprōteuō*

*Philo* = love

*Proteuo* = first place / preeminence / supremacy (The Greek word used here by John is only used one other time in the N.T. – in **Col. 1:18** “And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy.”)

So we can clearly see that Diotrephes was an ego-maniac and he was a control freak.

He had a love for the spotlight – a love for power and for being the most important person in the church.

But church leadership is not a position of prominence – but one of serving and sacrifice. In God's Kingdom, those who try to claim the place of honor will be at the end of the line.

Matt. 20:25 ff

“Jesus called them together and said, “You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave--just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”

Diotrephes lorded his power over those in the church. We're not sure why he did this. Last week I mentioned how Gaius' name was a very common name in Greco-Roman culture. It might be helpful to know that Diotrephes was a very uncommon name – a very rare name in the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> century. In fact, the name means “nourished by Zeus” or “foster child of Zeus” – and it seems to be a name only used by families of royalty. If this is true, then Diotrephes may be

a spoiled brat who was an arrogant aristocrat. This certainly wouldn't excuse his attitude – but it might help us understand why it existed. However, his problem was not just an attitude, but his actions were also very harmful and dangerous. John tells us that he not only loved to be in the place of prominence, but he did four things that were rooted in his pride.

- 1) He rejected the authority and influence of the Apostle John. (“...will have nothing to do with us.”)
- 2) He spread lies about the Apostle and the traveling missionaries. (“...gossiping maliciously about us.”)
- 3) He is not hospitable (“...refuses to welcome the brothers.”)
- 4) He excommunicates those who practice hospitality (“...puts them out of the church.”)

As you can see – this was a dangerous and harmful leader. His pride wasn't just an awkward and frustrating quirk – his pride was damaging the spread of the Gospel and attacking those in the church who were trying to help those who were teaching and preaching about Christ.

This kind of prideful leader happens today. This is not just an issue the church dealt with in the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> centuries.

**Illus.** – James – FBC Mammoth

Notice in vs. 10 – that John says he is not content or satisfied with ignoring the Apostle's authority or saying empty, false things about him.

The prideful leader must do anything and everything to protect their perch of power and control. Most often, they talk in negative terms about other leaders / potential leaders. They are seen as threats – not as co-laborers for the Gospel. In this case – it wasn't enough to organize a smear campaign against the Apostle and the traveling missionaries – but Diotrephes acted aggressively against them – and refused to offer hospitality when it was needed – and even kicked people out of the church who did offer hospitality – the very thing that Gaius was commended for in vs. 5-8!

It's a sad reality that this kind of controlling and abusing leadership has always affected a portion of churches. On top of that sad truth, when this happens, the people in the church are too afraid to challenge the prideful leader and their sin is never confronted.

John makes it clear that he will not allow this to continue – the sheep are being harmed and he will act to protect them. Notice he doesn't make big threats – he doesn't talk of drastic action. But he does promise to expose Diotrephes for who he is and what he is doing. There is no need for the Apostle to give more detail or speculate on how Diotrephes will respond. He is probably hopeful and praying that Diotrephes will repent and submit to the truth – but speculation is not in order – and it's not healthy either.

**Biblical leadership we should imitate.** vs. 11-12

Demetrius is probably a traveling missionary – and most scholars believe his is the one delivering this short letter to Gaius.

Letters carried by missionaries who were commended in the letter was common in the early church.

**1 Cor. 16:3** Then, when I arrive, I will send those whom you approve with letters of explanation to carry your gift to Jerusalem.

John's command **not** to imitate what is evil refers to Diotrephes – John calls his practice "evil" – and Gaius is encouraged to follow the model that Demetrius brings to him. As John has taught through the book of 1 John, our good actions (love of truth & others) reveals our faith – and bad / evil actions expose one's claim of faith in Christ to be weak and possibly non-existent.

All throughout the N.T., believers are exhorted to imitate God, to imitate good things, but most often, we are exhorted

to imitate people who are faithful to Christ (1 Thess. 1:6; 2 Thess. 3:7-9; 1 Cor. 11:1). Our imitation of godly people

In order to testify to Demetrius' character and trustworthiness as a person and in the work of the Gospel, John gives the testimony of three witnesses. **First**, he says that Demetrius is well spoken of by "everyone". "Everyone" probably refers to those who are assisting John in his ministry – or the believers who know Demetrius. He had a good reputation among the Christian community. **Second**, he says that the "truth itself" testifies to Demetrius' character. This tells us that Demetrius not only knew the truth – but he lived his life according to the truth. **Third**, the Apostle affirms Demetrius by his own testimony – and he reminds Gaius of the trust that already exists between them.

John 19:35 "And the person who saw it has testified (and his testimony is true, and he knows that he is telling the truth), so that you also may believe."

Deut. 19:15b "A matter must be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses."

### **A leader's love and friendship** vs. 13-14 (some translation have vs. 15)

The closing verses of 3 John are very similar to 2 John. The Apostle has much more to say – and instead of writing a lengthy letter, he will talk face to face with Gaius soon. Most likely, John is getting ready to visit some of the churches throughout Asia Minor – and Gaius's church will be one of his stops. He and his traveling companions will probably stay at Gaius' home and the hospitality they have heard about from others, they will experience first-hand.

### **Application**

If you have been hurt by sinful church leadership, forgiveness is the only path to healing.

Bitterness, anger, hatred, holding grudges, will not destroy those who hurt you; these things will destroy your own heart and soul.

Eph. 4:31

“Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice.”

Know the standard of church leadership. (1 Tim. 3 / Titus 1)

Unless you know the Biblical standard for church leaders, you cannot hold your leaders accountable.

Have confidence in the Gospel / truth of Christ.

Love one another.

Close in prayer