

3 John 1:9-10 – I wrote something to the church; but Diotrephes, who loves to be first among them, does not accept what we say. 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.

Introduction:

This is a personal letter that was distributed throughout the churches in the 1st and 2nd Centuries. The content is not deeply theological, but it does teach us about God in that it teaches us what is commendable. Gaius is highly praised; we should learn why. Diotrephes is admonished; we should understand why.

Observations:

These two verses introduce a person that is in contrast to Gaius. The translation of these statements is not overly difficult, but there are some words that we need to examine.

Diotrephes or his actions are characterized in these two verses in six statements:

1. He loves to be first among them (the church)
2. Does not accept what we say
3. Unjustly accusing us with wicked words
4. He does not receive the brethren
5. Forbids those who desire
6. Puts them out of the church

Analysis:

In both verses, the word for *church* is accurately translated from "ἐκκλησία ekklēsia." John first states that he wrote to the church, but (*alla*) Diotrephes

In context, *we* or *us* refers to John and the brethren who evidently were sent to this church.

Diotrephes is called one *who loves to be first*. The phrase is an articular participle, "φιλοπρωτεύω philoprōteuō." This is the only time this is used in the Bible. This is a compound word combining "*philo*" and "*protos*." Outside of the Bible, the word is used a couple of times and its use is consistent and just like it sounds, "one who wishes to be first," especially in the context of other people; to have a special interest in being in the leading position. The phrase is a condemnation of Diotrephes, telling Gaius and the church that Diotrephes is not a leader but one who desires to control.

What is translated "does not accept what we say" is literally "does not accept us." The problem is that he is ignoring the letter by not receiving the people.

Last week, we discussed how Gaius is praised for loving the brethren and helping workers for the sake of Jesus Christ and the Gospel. We recalled how letters usually preceded (or accompanied) these traveling evangelists and the expectation is that fellow believers would assist them and thus become fellow workers.

This statement "does not receive us" is a direct refusal to help the brethren. Why doesn't Diotrephes want to help the brethren? Because he wants to be in control.

John tells Gaius that if he would come (3rd Class conditional), then he would bring to remembrance the works he does. This activity is not a single incident but a perpetual problem. What are these works?

Unjustly accusing is translated from "φλυαρέω phluareō," which means to indulge in utterance that makes no sense, talk nonsense (about), or disparage with evil words.

The Letter to Gaius from John the Apostle – 3rd John

In response to the letter and the request to support the travelers, Diotrephes speaks evil of them and talks nonsense with evil words about John and the brethren.

The rest of the verse is clear. Diotrephes does not *receive* the brethren (same word as verse 9), he forbids the ones who desire to do so, and casts them out from the assembly.

Who he is casting out? In the text, the only direct object is “the brethren.”

We all know of people who, when entrusted with leadership and responsibility, can develop a superiority complex. A letter from an apostle is no longer seen as amazing or an opportunity but a threat to Diotrephes. Diotrephes will do anything to hold onto power.

John exposes Diotrephes for who he is and the severe sin of not following Apostolic authority and not loving the brethren (1 John 3:23).

Concluding observations

1. Diotrephes’ theology is not expressed.
2. There are only two basic problems: not respecting apostolic authority and not loving the brethren. But these problems are very severe.

3 John 1:11 – 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.

With the condemnation of Diotrephes now comes the instruction.

Beloved refers back to Gaius, verse 1 (singular masculine). A literal translation will make verse 11 easier to interpret.

"Do not imitate the evil but the good. The one who does good is of God, but the one who does evil has not seen God."

In the first sentence, the word *good* is "ἀγαθός agathos." There are two Greek words which are typically translated good, this word and "καλός kalos." Remember that "kalos" means something that is advantageous, noble, helpful, beautiful, and so on. "Agathos" is good of a godly standard (Mark 10:17-18).

Next, the word, "does good," is a compound word in the Greek, "agathos" plus the verb "poieo"— "ἀγαθοποιέω agathopoieō," doing divine good. This genitive phrase "of God" is not simply "theou," in the genitive form, but it is preceded by a preposition, "ek." This preposition means "from or sourced in." The who does good is sourced from God. Many commentaries say that this is a test of salvation. But this is a test of whom to imitate. We should test the character of leadership. If a leader or would-be leader does not demonstrate the quality of a good leader, get rid of him.

The main test of leadership is twofold: do they follow apostolic teaching, and do they love the brethren?

How do we know that this is a test of leadership? We know by the word *imitate* translated from "μιμέομαι *mimeomai*" (2 Thessalonians 3:7-9; Hebrews 13:7).

The text does not state or infer that we are testing someone’s salvation. The truth statement refers to who is truly representing God. Again, the leadership of an assembly (ekklesia) is based upon two basic

The Letter to Gaius from John the Apostle – 3rd John

requirements: do they teach the truth, the doctrines of God, and do they live a life that is a good example, exemplified by the love for the brethren.

3 John 1:12-15 – Demetrius has received a good testimony from everyone, and from the truth itself, and we add our testimony, and you know that our testimony is true. I had many things to write to you, but I am not willing to write them to you with pen and ink; but I hope to see you shortly, and we will speak face to face. Peace be to you. The friends greet you. Greet the friends by name.

Concluding the letter:

We do not know who Demetrius is, but we can determine that he is a person who has a good reputation and also is given his credentials by the Apostle John.

John says goodbye by telling Gaius that he will come soon and address everything face-to-face and to say hi to everyone by name.

Conclusion:

The main thrust of this book is fourfold: to walk in truth, love others, avoid evil, and imitate what is good.

To walk in truth is to have a life that is consistent with the reality of the Gospel and the value system set forth by God. This is demonstrated particularly in Gaius's life.

Gaius demonstrated love for others by providing for fellow believers, especially those who were not known to him. Gaius provided for them while they were with him and he also gave them provisions for their next trip.

Imitation is a word that denotes leadership; imitating good and not evil is a test of leadership.

The evil is exemplified in Diotrephes. His behavior in babbling nonsense with evil words about John and the those who work on behalf of Jesus Christ and the Gospel is "the evil."

The good is done by those who uphold apostolic teaching and who love the brethren. It is those who are established as ones who do what is good, the ones that they should have in leadership.

Artistic License:

John had sent letters to this church prior to or accompanying men who were stopping by there as they travel to spread the Word of God. In this church, one prominent member, Diotrephes, refuses to help them, does not accept them, and kicks them out of the assembly. One of the traveling evangelists is Demetrius who has decided not to take any help from the non-believing Gentiles so as to not subject himself to a moral dilemma. He is not only refused help but is spoken evil of to the point that the church believes that he is evil and they should not associate with him. Gaius goes against Diotrephes and welcomes the brethren and supports them as they travel. This word gets back to John who then writes this letter in response to the situation.

In the letter, Gaius is praised, Diotrephes is admonished, and Demetrius is restored.