

Diotrephes, Who Loveth To Have The Preeminence

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I wrote unto the church: but Diotrephes, who loveth to have the preeminence among them, receiveth us not. Wherefore, if I come, I will remember his deeds which he doeth, prating against us with malicious words: and not content therewith, neither doth he himself receive the brethren, and forbiddeth them that would, and casteth them out of the church. (3 John 9-10)

You don't hear of many kids being named Diotrephes today, do you? Of course not! No one desires to be identified as such. But while the name may not continue on in our day, the attributes surely do. Let's take the time to examine a few things about Diotrephes.

What was Diotrephes' problem?

There is much to be said about Diotrephes' problem but we will note only two aspects of it:

- ① *He loved to be first.* The phrase "*loveth to have preeminence*" literally means to love or be fond of being first. He was of such character that he took a position and authority not due him.
- ② *He was willing to do whatever it took to have "first place."* As such we are told he willfully refused to receive God given authority in the person and work of John the apostle ("*receiveth us not*"), made false accusations against God given authority and strived to "bully" the church into following him ("*prating ... with malicious words*").

How sad such a description is ... how sad for the church the results of such character allowed to go unchecked.

Does Diotrephes' problem live today?

Let me answer that question by simply recounting briefly several incidents among us:

- An evangelist from America visiting a congregation in another country chastises brethren for trying to tell him about the order and such of worship services ... after all "*I started this church.*"
- The board of directors of a "disaster relief" effort claiming to be a work of the church makes the decision it will not be under the oversight of an eldership so it can remain aloof of problems in the brotherhood.
- A preacher moves and takes with him the paper he has been editing under the oversight of the elders.
- A man hired by elders to be a full time director of a work under the oversight of that eldership declares he has the right to labor in that position on a part time basis and accept a position with another congregation [while continuing to receive full time pay for the first work].
- When problems arise in a congregation which oversees a large fund for evangelism, the evangelist, whose work they also oversee, moves the funds to another eldership so they can oversee them.

Brethren, it does not take a mental giant to see the attitudes which are in the above situations — men

taking a position and authority not due them and doing whatever it takes to hold that position — and these are but the tip of the iceberg.

Why Does Diotrephes' Problem Still Live?

Perhaps the main reason such continues is elders who fail to "take heed ... to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers" (Acts 20:28). It is rare indeed to find an eldership truly in oversight of works of the church. Oh, there are a lot of "bankers" for foreign works, a lot of elderships used as "fronts" for preachers and their pet projects, but let the eldership make a decision concerning that work and see who is really in "oversight" as the work is moved from their "oversight!" As a result there are many in positions of influence and power who are unchecked in their actions and have fallen prey to the temptation of pride and power. Such men have demonstrated they will sacrifice the precious principles of our Lord and Savior, and thus the church itself to have their way. Such need to be called into check by the elders of the Lord's church. The tragic result of failure to do such is plain. As brother Robert Taylor has said in his book *Studies in First, Second and Third John*, "The disposition of Diotrephes has always brought havoc to the Lord's church. It is the very disposition that would pave the way for the ... development of the Roman Papacy..." (81). We could even bring it a little closer to home and say "Remember the Crossroads." The divisive and destructive force of the "Crossroads"/"Boston" movement began with the same attitude. *What will develop next?*

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