

Diotrephes and Demetrius

III John 9-12

7/01/07

Intro

The highlight of this short book is two very different men. The contrast between them is so dramatic that we are drawn to understand their character and the lessons we can receive from their lives.

The Apostle John is the writer and we assume he wrote this letter at about the same time and place in which he wrote first and second John. He is an old man at this point in his life and the church has grown through much of the Roman Empire to the point that John was well known as an Apostle and as an elder statesman, we could say, of the church as a whole.

Therefore, it is a surprise that when John recommends some men visiting a certain church, that they would be unwelcome, put out and even that others were prevented from helping them.

The trouble was a fellow named Diotrophes, who loved to be first and was genuinely a difficult person. But there was another fellow, named Demetrius, who was spoken of very highly by John.

These are lessons we can learn from the examples of two very different men.

I. Don't Love to be First

- We don't know all the details about why Diotrophes was so difficult, but clearly he didn't want John to be recognized as the leader he was.
- So he decided to take matters in his own hands because he loved to be first.

A. Desire to be changed

- Let's begin here by understanding something important about his name. It means, "*Nurtured by Zeus.*"
- Many people in that day had been born with names that referred to Greek or Roman gods, but when they became Christians, they changed their names when they were baptized.
- What's clear, then, is that Diotrophes was stubbornly holding onto the past, unwilling to be changed.

App – Many people have resisted change by saying, 'that's just who I am.' God knows who we are, but loves us too much to have us stay that way.

Revelation 21:5-6, And He who sits on the throne said, "Behold, I am making all things new." And He said, "Write, for these words are faithful and true."

Isaiah 43:18-19, Do not call to mind the former things, or ponder things of the past. Behold, I will do something

new, now it will spring forth; will you not be aware of it?

- The scripture tells us that we will also receive a new name...

Revelation 3:12-13, “He who overcomes, I will make him a pillar in the temple of My God, and he will not go out from it anymore; and I will write on him the name of My God, and the name of the city of My God, the new Jerusalem, which comes down out of heaven from My God, and My new name.”

B. Let God be in control

- Diotrophes wanted to be in control so he became difficult and manipulative, trying to keep himself in the place where he was first.
- To be first means that he wants everything his way, so he has to be in control.

Illus – Many churches have tensions because there are people who want to be in control of how things are done; whether it’s hymns or order of service, etc.

Illus – Saul, the man who became King before David was an example of the same thing. He wanted to be in control and would not trust that God was able to do what He promised.

By all appearances Saul was a man who stood out from the rest, but we see soon after he became King that he had to do things his way.

At one point, Saul is instructed by the Lord not to go into battle until the prophet Samuel offered a sacrifice to God, but Saul thought Samuel was taking too long so he did the sacrificing himself.

I Samuel 13:13-14, Samuel said to Saul, “You have acted foolishly; you have not kept the commandment of the Lord your God, which He commanded you, for now the Lord would have established your kingdom over Israel forever. But now your kingdom shall not endure. The Lord has sought out for Himself a man after His own heart, and the Lord has appointed him as ruler over His people, because you have not kept what the Lord commanded you.”

Later he was told to take out the Amalekites completely, leaving no survivors, but when Samuel arrives, he discovers that Saul has kept King Agag as a hostage. What’s interesting is that when Saul dies in battle, he dies by the hand of an Amalekite.

- Saul was killed by the thing he should have destroyed. Diotrophes’ church was hindered because he refused to get out of the way of what God wanted to do.

C. Accept God’s Word to direct your life

- Vs 9 – this was the issue in Diotrophes life, he would not accept what God was doing.
- If he had to have first place, then God’s Word would not be first place in his life either.

- In other words, if he has to be in control, then he will also not let God be in control.

Illus – God made it clear to King Saul that He had selected someone else to be King in Israel, and that it was David. But he would not accept it and stubbornly insisted that things had to be his way. So he tried to take David’s life.

- But here’s is where we learn some great lessons from David’s life. He refused to take control.
- Though he knew that he had been chosen by God as king, he would not place himself there.

Illus – When Saul threw a spear at him, he could have thrown it back, but refused. At one point, David was hiding in a cave when Saul came in to relieve himself. He could easily have taken Saul’s life, but refused.

I Samuel 24:11-12, “Now, my father, see! Indeed, see the edge of your robe in my hand! For in that I cut off the edge of your robe and did not kill you, know and perceive that there is no evil or rebellion in my hands, and I have not sinned against you, though you are lying in wait for my life to take it. May the Lord judge between you and me, and may the Lord avenge me on you; but my hand shall not be against you.”

- He had accepted God’s Word and believed that God would be the power behind His Word.

Jeremiah 10:23, I know, O Lord, that a man's way is not in himself, nor is it in a man who walks to direct his steps.

<h2>II. Stay True in Difficult Places</h2>
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A. Let good be spoken of you

- We don’t know all the details about Demetrius’ life, but we believe that John sent him to the church where Diotrephes was being difficult.
- John sent him there as a man who had the testimony of everyone in the church that he was a good Christian man.

Illus – I know many of whom I can say the same thing. They’re just good people who love the Lord and it comes through in their countenance, their life, and their decisions.

- The challenge is that a man with a good testimony is now going to encounter a man who likes to be in control and is willing to use despicable methods to get his way.
- We know that he was making false accusations against John, he was bullying other people by saying that if anyone received John’s men that he would put them out of the church.
- Does Diotrephes have the advantage? Can those who use worldly and immature ways defeat the ones who are good?

Illus – When I was young, and wrestling was real, I used to become distraught that the bad guys could get away with so much.

- What should Demetrius do? What should you do?

I Peter 3:8-16 Do not return evil for evil.

Illus – When King David was escaping from Jerusalem to save his life, Shimei walk along the opposite bank and hurled insult at him, but David refused to harm him.

B. Receive the testimony of the truth

- Demetrius was known as man who walked according to God’s Word. He honored God’s Word in his life and this was well known by those nearest him.
- Now, as he is sent to a church where there are great troubles, he carried this testimony with him as authority.

Illus – There was a ‘prophetess’ who appeared in the church many years ago and wanted to have a place of authority. I sent word that I expected the same testimony as we see here in 3 John. I never heard from her again.

App – These three men are examples that in every church there are a variety of people. Some like Gaius, boldly being a man of God in troubled times. Some like Diotrephes who become difficult to get their way. Some like Demetrius who carried the testimony of everyone and even of the truth itself that he was a good man of God.

- There is an issue of faith in this situation. There is a great difference between the church and the Elks Lodge; the Spirit of God resides in the church and God is still on the throne.

Proverbs 20:21-22, An inheritance gained hurriedly at the beginning will not be blessed in the end. Do not say, “I will repay evil”; wait for the Lord, and He will save you.

Psalm 86:11-12, Teach me Your way, O Lord; I will walk in Your truth; unite my heart to fear Your name. I will give thanks to You, O Lord my God, with all my heart, and will glorify Your name forever.