



3 John

Division In a Church

- Power-hungry leaders create division in a church
- 3 John 1:9–10; Matthew 20:20–28
- In the first half of this letter, John commended Gaius for walking in the truth (vv. 3–4) and loving the traveling disciples whom Gaius hosted when they came through town (vv. 5–8).
- In this second half of the letter, John condemned another individual in the church, Diotrephes (whose name means “cherished by Zeus,” the chief god of the Greek pantheon) for doing the exact opposite (vv. 9–10).

Division In a Church

- John described Diotrephes as one “who likes to put himself first” (v. 9).
- But as we see in Jesus’ words to the disciples about leadership and authority in God’s kingdom, that’s not His way.
- When the disciples argued over who would be in the positions of high authority in Jesus’ kingdom (those who sit at His right and His left), Jesus said that anyone who wishes to be great in His kingdom must live as a servant, not lord his or her authority over the people (Matthew 20:25–28).

Division In a Church

- Notice that Diotrephes put himself first. He wasn't given authority by the apostles or voted into the highest leadership position by the elders.
- He just put himself in a position of authority.
- This was an early church power-grab situation.
- Then, as people who try to usurp authority always do, he attempted to delegitimize the real authority in the church.
- He spread “wicked nonsense” against John and the missionaries.

Division In a Church

- Diotrephes refused to welcome the traveling disciples who were coming through town.
- He even drew a line in the sand about it – Diotrephes kicked out of the church anyone who welcomed those disciples (v. 10).
- How did one person get that kind of authority?
- This isn't just a first-century problem. The same thing could happen in a modern church today if a power-hungry person snaked his way into leadership.

Division In a Church

- John was writing to Gaius because Gaius did welcome the missionaries and had stayed faithful to the truth and love (3 John 1:3).
- John wasn't going to let Diotrephes destroy this church, and he wasn't going to handle the situation quietly or sweep things under the rug.
- John was probably going to publicly confront Diotrephes and put a stop to the division (1 Timothy 5:20).
- John was being a good shepherd, protecting the flock from a wolf who would destroy them as Paul described in Acts 20.

Division In a Church

- There are still “fierce wolves” in the world today who can infiltrate our churches and destroy our flocks. We need to “pay careful attention” (Acts 20:28–31).
- If someone is creating divisions in the church or spreading gossip about the leaders (or anyone else, really), we need to watch out. They may be trying to steal power for themselves.
- Christian leaders who lead like Jesus do so with humility and love. They see their leadership positions as ministries, not as a power play. They are there to serve, not to be served (Matthew 20:25–28).

Division In a Church

- Jesus said false teachers are like wolves dressed in sheep's clothing. They're coming in to destroy the flock, but they're dressed like one of the sheep, so we don't recognize them right away (Matthew 7:15–19).
- Those who enter church leadership to try to garner power for themselves often operate in a similar manner. They sneak in, seemingly innocent at first, but then start creating factions and leading people astray from the church leaders.
- Jesus said we can know the true believers by their fruit – love, joy, peace, patience, kindness and so on (Galatians 5:22–23).

Live As Jesus Lived

- Children of God live as Jesus lived
- 3 John 1:11–12; 1 John 3:7–10; Ephesians 5:1–2
- Diotrephes's evil actions were not to be mimicked.
- Instead, John encouraged Gaius to imitate good, just as Paul implored the Ephesians to imitate God, since they were His beloved children.
- In this section, John mentioned yet another individual, Demetrius, as a contrast to Diotrephes.

Live As Jesus Lived

- John was encouraging Gaius and the rest of the people in his church who would hear this letter to choose between evil and good. To choose to live as Jesus lived.
- As Paul told the Ephesians, just as children imitate their parents, so children of God will imitate God.
- Paul told people to imitate him as he was imitating Christ (1 Corinthians 11:1). Good church leaders can be so helpful in showing us what it looks like to follow Jesus in this world, but the One we are really imitating is Jesus.

Live As Jesus Lived

- Paul told the Philippians that whether people preached Christ out of love or out of selfish ambition – either way – he was happy that Christ was being preached. But that didn't mean he approved of preaching Christ out of selfish ambition.
- He called that preaching out of “pretense” versus the truth (Philippians 1:15–18). We need to be especially cautious of leaders such as Diotrephes who “love to be first.”
- Leaders who really love and follow Jesus are servant-leaders, not all about their own power and status (Luke 22:25–27; Philippians 2:1–8).

Live As Jesus Lived

- It's best to talk about hard things face-to-face
- 3 John 1:13–15; 2 John 1:12–13
- John closed both 2 and 3 John with the same statement, that he had much more to say, but he wanted to visit his readers and say it face to face.
- Talking with people face to face is a more complete experience than trying to talk through letters, as in the ancient world, or any of the other ways we communicate in our modern world – text, direct message, social media, tweet, e-mail or phone.

Live As Jesus Lived

- The best way to have an important conversation with someone is face to face because more than 90 percent of human communication is done through body language, tone of voice and nonverbal cues.
- The look in someone's eyes, the tone of their voice, their hand gestures, the way they stand or sit – all communicate things well beyond their words.
- As we have all experienced, things can get lost, miscommunicated, or misinterpreted very easily over e-mail, text, or other written-only communication.

Live As Jesus Lived

- Person to person interaction is important to true human connection, cooperation and relationship building.
- In response to how COVID moved many companies to work-from-home and virtual communication, *Harvard Business Review* maintained that in a business, collaboration, innovation, acculturation and dedication all require face-to-face, in-person interaction.
- We learned the same thing from the impact on the church during COVID. It's hard to build true community when you can't meet in person.

Live As Jesus Lived

- Another clear contrast in this letter is between Diotrephes' spreading gossip and creating division and John's wanting to come talk with them face to face to get rid of divisions and bring unity.
- The best way to work through hard things is by speaking face to face. The solution to disagreements or conflict is never through gossip or bad-mouthing the other side.
- Jesus told us clearly, if we have a conflict with someone in the church, to go directly to him or her and work through it (Matthew 18:15–17).

Application:
A Tale of Three Men

Gaius - A Generous Man

- Gaius was evidently a Christian leader in a local church.
- He was well-known and well-loved by John, the apostle.
- He was probably led to Christ by John - spiritual “children.”
- He is a (1) balanced man (walking in truth), a (2) faithful man (John mentions his faithfulness), and a (3) generous man (visiting ministers).
- Churches established by the apostles welcomed teachers into their homes, and provided for them until their next stop. Gaius has the gift of hospitality and generous with those who came to the local church.

Diotrephes - A Divisive Man

- Diotrephes who was just the opposite in many ways for Gaius.
- John describes him in five ways: (1) self-willed (loves to be first), (2) rebellious (will have nothing to do with us), (3) slanderer (gossiping maliciously), (4) ungracious (refuses to welcome brothers), and (5) power abuser (stops people and puts them out of the church).
- Some have called him the first “church boss.” He uses power for ungodly ends within the church.
- Notice that John says nothing about his theology (not his problem).

How to Spot a Diotrophes

- Talks too much - dominates every conversation.
- Critical spirit - especially to anyone who disagrees with him.
- Always taking sides - looking at who is in power.
- Superiority - thinks he can do better than people in leadership.
- Argumentative - especially over minor details of church life.
- Rebellious - toward leaders who have authority over him.
- Offended - takes it personally when advice isn't followed.

Demetrius - A Reputable Man

- Demetrius is well-spoken about by everyone.
- We don't know much about him, but what we do know is positive.
- He is a man of good reputation (he is above reproach).
- He is grounded in the truth.
- He was probably the bearer of this letter to Gaius
- He might have been one of the missionaries who traveled from local church to local church.

Final Thoughts

- There is no perfect church because there are no perfect people.
- We becomes like the people we follow. John told Gaius not to follow evil but to follow what is good. If you follow Gaius, you will be generous. If you follow Diotrephes, you will be critical and the troublemaker.
- The spirit of Diotrephes can be found in many churches today. Many church splits are over one of two things: money or power.
- There is value in shared leadership. We have checks and balances in government, and we need them within the church.

Resources

