

READING

3 John

SERMON

The Love of Power (3 John)

“We don’t have leaders here, we are all equal together” says Gary in a meeting of Egalitarian Baptist Church. This is Gary who, without a minister being in the church, is

- the treasurer,
- the church secretary and
- preaches every week and
- also draws up the agendas for the meetings held at the church.

Everyone looked to him for the answers, but he would say that he is not the leader and that all are equal. However

- as secretary Gary has all the correspondence,
- as treasurer he holds the purse strings and says if a venture suggested by someone else can or cannot be afforded by the church.
- Also as the only preacher he decided on the topics preached and is the only one in the pulpit, and
- of course he also organises the people to preach when he is away.
- as the one who draws up the agendas he controls the items spoken about

In this situation one cannot really tell if Gary is one who has a love of power or is just a great servant for God helping a church which has no minister.

In this letter from John we have one man, Diotrephes who definitely has a love of power

“I wrote to the church, but Diotrephes, *who loves to be first*, will have nothing to do with us.” (3 John 1:9 NIV)

Or as the Message says

Earlier I wrote something along this line to the church, but Diotrephes, who loves being in charge, denigrates my counsel. (3 John 1:9 MSG)

We have here is 3 John another short letter from The Elder, who is normally taken to be John as I said last week when we looked at 2 John. But in this letter we have 3 other people mentioned, Gaius, Diotrephes and Demetrius. Gaius is the recipient of the letter and the other two are mentioned within the letter. So this evening we are going to look at these three people, the first being Diotrephes.

Diotrephes

He is only mentioned here, so we know little of his background. He is obviously Greek as his name means *Nourished by Jupiter*. But that is not his problem, his problem is that he wants to be top dog and it seems that he is doing this in several ways.

- **Destroys unity** – firstly he destroys unity by divide and rule. There are problems in the church as we read in verse 10

“So if I come, I will call attention to what he is doing, gossiping maliciously about us. Not satisfied with that, he refuses to welcome the brothers. He also stops those who want to do so and puts them out of the church.” (3 John 1:10 NIV)

The church had become fragmented because of the tension being caused by Diotrephes. He has been gossiping about people and this will so often lead to people being pitted against people.

- **Flaunting authority** – there was a disregard for authority. John the Elder was shunned as he says in verse 9

“I wrote to the church, but Diotrephes, who loves to be first, will have nothing to do with us.” (3 John 1:9 NIV)

Even though John is an Elder his authority is not recognised. There are sadly those in Baptist Churches who will not recognise that they are Baptist and part of the Baptist Union and so make use of the Regional Ministers in their area. Now we know that Regional Ministers have no real authority in the local church but they do have experience, they have expertise and also contacts.

The road to love of power is the road of the individualist who makes up his or her own authority

- **Makes Up Own Rules to Safeguard Position** – It seems as if Diotrephes is also making up church rules to safeguard his own position. If someone threatens, get rid of them, verse 10

“So if I come, I will call attention to what he is doing, gossiping maliciously about us. Not satisfied with that, he refuses to welcome the brothers. He also stops those who want to do so and puts them out of the church.” (3 John 1:10 NIV)

We are not told how Diotrephes made it such that John was barred from coming to the church, that some who come to the church are stopped from coming, but that is what he is doing to keep his position as top dog.

In a church there was a deacon who wanted to keep power. If something was voted in at a Members' meeting, a resolution was voted in, that this deacon disagreed with, the deacon would go round to the proposer of the resolution. The deacon would then say to the proposer, very nicely if they minded if the resolution was not acted upon because, although it went through the Members' meeting and the Members did say 'Yes' that they were only doing this so as not to upset you, the proposer and if we as a church acted upon the resolution it would cause quite a lot of hurt for quite a few people. So do you mind if we quietly forget the resolution. And also it might be better if we kept this conversation quiet.

And the people being good Christian people did not want to upset anyone and so let the matter drop. The deacon effectively changed the rules so things only got acted upon that the deacon wanted to be acted upon.

- **Spread Lies** – Diotrephes was also spreading lies. Verse 10 again

“So if I come, I will call attention to what he is doing, gossiping maliciously about us. Not satisfied with that, he refuses to welcome the brothers. He also stops those who want to do so and puts them out of the church.” (3 John 1:10 NIV)

The New Living Translation put it this way

“When I come, I will report some of the things he is doing and the evil accusations he is making against us. Not only does he refuse to welcome the travelling teachers, he also tells others not to help them. And when they do help, he puts them out of the church.” (3 John 1:10 NLT)

The gossip is malicious, making up lies about people – again because he has a love of power, the power of his position. Maybe Diotrephes has little power at work, or perhaps he's henpecked at home? We do not know but sadly there are people in churches that have little power elsewhere and in church they can become a big fish in a small pond and they cling onto that power at all costs.

But this is not to say that all people in positions which might be considered positions of power or what might be thought of as roles of authority in church are necessarily bad people. We will be looking at them when we view Gaius and Demetrius.

- **Cuts Off Other Christians** – Diotrephes also cuts off other Christians. We have touched on this before. Verse 10

“So if I come, I will call attention to what he is doing, gossiping maliciously about us. Not satisfied with that, he refuses to welcome the brothers. He also stops those who want to do so and puts them out of the church.” (3 John 1:10 NIV)

He refused to speak to fellow Christians. They may be a threat to him.

Diotrephes does not even necessarily have to be on the leadership of the church. There are churches up and down this land who are governed by a strong personality, or by a strong family who may have money. Sue and I once went to take a service in a church where there was a millionaire in the congregation, who had given generously to the church – but nothing happened in that church unless he said it would, even though he was not a deacon, an elder or on any sort of ministry team.

So let us turn to

Demetrius

He could be having a rough time of it as we read of his character in verse 12

“Demetrius is well spoken of by everyone—and even by the truth itself. We also speak well of him, and you know that our testimony is true.” (3 John 1:12 NIV)

So who is Demetrius? The name Demetrius means *Belonging to Demeter* who was the goddess of agriculture and rural life and is mentioned in the book of Acts. He is a silversmith making silver models for the temple at Ephesus and is responsible for inciting a mob to riot when the teachings of Paul begin to attack his profit base because the more converts to Christianity there are, the less to buy his models for the pagan temple. Whether this is the same one as mentioned here in 3 John, but converted of course, we do not know.

However Demetrius is living the true Christian life – he is living by the truth. Even the truth i.e. the teachings of Christ testify to his good character. His life cannot remain hidden. As we saw the other week in Voyage of Discovery, we cannot be hidden Christians – there is no such thing. Jesus said

“In the same way, let your light shine before all, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.” (Matthew 5:16 NIV)

Our words may mean a lot, but so often it is our deeds that speak so much more.

Demetrius lived by God's word – do we? It is some standard to live up to and we can only begin to do that if we know God's Word, if we read the Bible, but sadly only around 25% of Christians read their Bible from one Sunday to the next.

Demetrius is the example of what is good in a person as opposed to Diotrephes who is evil.

Gaius

So what about the third person mentioned? We have had the good in Demetrius, the bad in Diotrephes, but we do not have the ugly in Gaius. In fact in the letter we have a sandwich of good, bad and then good.

However Gaius must have been worried as he was facing opposition – possibly from Diotrephes and his friends but Gaius is hanging on in there. Verse 5

“Dear friend, you are faithful in what you are doing for the brothers, even though they are strangers to you.” (3 John 1:5 NIV)

Let us read more of Gaius from verse 2

“Dear friend, I pray that you may enjoy good health and that all may go well with you, even as your soul is getting along well. It gave me great joy to have some brothers come and tell about your faithfulness to the truth and how you continue to walk in the truth. I have no greater joy than to hear that my children are walking in the truth.” (3 John 1:2-4 NIV)

Gaius is a common Roman name meaning *I am glad*. Gaius is not just a friend of John’s but a faithful and true friend who is an *agapetos* – a dear friend with obvious link to *agape*, the word for love, the love of God for us.

And did you notice that John is interested in the whole of his friends welfare. Verse 2

“Dear friend, I pray that you may enjoy good health and that all may go well with you, even as your soul is getting along well.” (3 John 1:2 NIV)

Enjoy good health – the body and also with your soul – the spiritual part. The danger is we neglect the bodily health is that we go either into asceticism where the body can be neglected or into the thought that it does not matter what I do with my body because it is only my soul, the spiritual side of me that matters. This is wrong thinking.

We are a whole and the body is important – it is not a case of the body being a cage for the soul. So it is right to enquire after someone’s health.

If that is negating the world we can swing too far into identification with the world and this leads us down the line of licence – doing what the world says is OK, or down the line of health and wealth theology where it is said that God wants his people to be healthy and wealthy. But this is not what we read in the book of Acts what happened to people like Stephen, like Paul, like Timothy.

So it is right to think of ourselves as physical beings and also as spiritual beings and to pray for each other. This is why the prayer partnership scheme we have here where we covenant to pray with someone for a month is a great way of praying for others. If you are not part of the scheme, then have a word with Brian or Ruth Waterfield about it.

Let us be like Gaius and Demetrius and not like Diotrephes who had a love of power. And notice that John wants to visit them and not carry on writing, but I had my rant about emails last week, so I will not repeat it again. But face to face contact is also a great way of sowing love to another person.