

12. Learning About the Dangers of Pride

In our last topic, we saw that we want to help our physical and spiritual children learn to walk in the truth. We saw that we also want to help them become fellow workers with those who are walking in the truth. In 2 John, we saw that we are not to become fellow workers with those who deny the truth. As a result, we see that it is very important to help our children learn to recognize those teachings that do not agree with the Word of God. In our topic today, we see that we want to help our children learn to deal with leaders who try to control others.

John had earlier written a letter to the church of which Gaius was a part. However, there was one of the leaders in that church named Diotrephes that did not accept the letter that had been written by John. 3 John 1:9-11 says, “I wrote to the church, but Diotrephes, who loves to have the preeminence among them, does not receive us. Therefore, if I come, I will call to mind his deeds which he does, prating against us with malicious words. And not content with that, he himself does not receive the brethren, and forbids those who wish to, putting *them* out of the church.” We learn several characteristics of Diotrephes that help us to realize that we have some leaders in churches today that have the very same attitudes.

First, the word that is translated “loves to have the preeminence” means *one that has a strong desire to be first or to be the most important person*. 1 Peter 5:3 says that leaders in the church are to lead by example, “Nor as being lords over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock.” They are not to seek personal power. In Mark 10:42, Christ told the disciples, “But Jesus called them to *Himself* and said to them, You know that those who are considered rulers over the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them.” Here, we see that there is a strong desire among many leaders who are in the world to bring others under their power so that they can exercise control over them. In contrast, Christ told the disciples in Mark 10:43, “Yet it shall not be so among you; but whoever desires to become great among you shall be your servant.” Paul also warned that such leaders can arise in the church. In Acts 20:30, Paul warned the elders of the church at Ephesus, “Also from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves.” Any leader who has this attitude is controlled by pride.

Second, we see that Diotrephes did not receive other church leaders including John, even though John was one of the apostles. The word translated “receive” means *to admit and show hospitality to*. The word is used only twice in the New Testament and those two places are here in verses nine and ten. This is a characteristic of leaders who want power. They do not want to show hospitality to anyone that they think might try to question the things that they do.

Third, Diotrephes spoke against John with malicious words. The word translated “prating against” means *to accuse a person falsely with evil words*. The word translated “malicious words” means *evil or wicked* and is used several times to speak of Satan. 2 Thessalonians 3:2-3 says, “And that we may be delivered from unreasonable and wicked men; for not all have faith. But the Lord is faithful, who will establish you and guard *you* from the evil one.” In these verses, we see the word is used twice: once to speak of wicked men and once to speak of Satan. As a result, in 3 John, we

see that Diotrephes was doing the work of Satan by his words about others.

Fourth, in addition to refusing to show hospitality to other Christians, we see that Diotrephes was forbidding the other people in the church to show hospitality to other Christians. This would be a direct violation of 1 Peter 4:8-9 where we are told, “And above all things have fervent love for one another, for ‘love will cover a multitude of sins.’ *Be hospitable to one another without grumbling.*” This shows that love was lacking in the life of Diotrephes.

Fifth, Diotrephes was putting out of the church those who tried to show hospitality to other Christians. The word translated “putting” means *to drive out, to cast out or to expel a person from a family or group*. Luke 7:57-58 says, “Then they cried out with a loud voice, stopped their ears, and ran at him with one accord; and they cast *him* out of the city and stoned *him*. And the witnesses laid down their clothes at the feet of a young man named Saul.” In these verses, the Jewish religious leaders cast Stephen out of the city and stoned him to death. Diotrephes showed the evil in his heart by casting Christians out of the church if they showed hospitality to other Christians.

That is why 3 John 1:11-12 goes on to say, “Beloved, do not imitate what is evil, but what is good. He who does good is of God, but he who does evil has not seen God. Demetrius has a *good* testimony from all, and from the truth itself. And we also bear witness, and you know that our testimony is true.” John did not want any Christians to imitate the evil example of Diotrephes. Here, we see that new leaders will often follow the example of other leaders. As a result, John wanted to make sure that no one would follow the evil example of Diotrephes. In fact, John went on to point out the fact that a leader who practiced such evil has not seen God. That means that such a person is not a Christian at all. Instead, such a person is a false teacher.

In contrast, we are also introduced to Demetrius who does provide an example for godly leaders to follow. John said to imitate the good instead of the evil. The word translated “good” means *that which is upright and honorable*. We see that the person that does good is a true follower of God. Acts 14:17 uses the word translated good to speak of God when that verse says, “Nevertheless He did not leave Himself without witness, in that He did good, gave us rain from heaven and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness.” Then, 1 Peter tells us why we are to do good what it says, “For this is the will of God, that by doing good you may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men.” Here, we see that it is the will of God for Christians to do good.

John wanted to make sure that Gaius did not follow the evil example of Diotrephes. As a result, John reminded Gaius of Demetrius and gave his life as an example to follow instead. Demetrius had a good report of all men. Paul used the word translated “good report” to describe godly widows when he said, in 1 Timothy 5:10, “Well reported for good works: if she has brought up children, if she has lodged strangers, if she has washed the saints' feet, if she has relieved the afflicted, if she has diligently followed every good work.” Here, we see that godly widows will have others speak about their good works because they are a godly example for others to follow.

John encouraged Gaius to follow the example of Demetrius because he had a good report of all of

the Christians. He had this good report because He was obedient to the truth. This word translated “truth” is often used to speak of the Word of God. John 8:32 says, “And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.” In John 14:6, this word is used to describe Christ when He said, “Jesus said to him, “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.” Then, in 1 John 5:6, we see that it describes the Holy Spirit when it says, “This is He who came by water and blood--Jesus Christ; not only by water, but by water and blood. And it is the Spirit who bears witness, because the Spirit is truth.” Like Demetrius, we will also have a good report as we are obedient to the truth. This will be the result of the fact that we are following Christ and the instructions that He gives in the Word of God as we yield our human spirit to the Holy Spirit.

John could also speak from his personal knowledge of the reputation of Demetrius and said that he personally knew that Demetrius was faithful in following the truth. Christ told Nicodemus, in John 3:21, “But he who does the truth comes to the light, that his deeds may be clearly seen, that they have been done in God.” Demetrius was a good example of one whose deeds showed that they had been done in God. In the same way, we want to be that kind of an example to our children and to all others so that our lives can also be an example for others to follow. We want to be able to say as Paul said, in 1 Corinthians 11:1, “Imitate me, just as I also *imitate* Christ.” When we can say that we imitate Christ, we provide a good example for others to follow.

3 John 3:13-14 concludes this short book by saying, “I had many things to write, but I do not wish to write to you with pen and ink; but I hope to see you shortly, and we shall speak face to face. Peace to you. Our friends greet you. Greet the friends by name.” John had many other things that he wanted to share with Gaius to help him in his spiritual growth and ministry for the Lord. However, instead of putting those things into a letter, John looked forward to the opportunity to see Gaius and to speak to him face to face. Here, we see the concern of a spiritual parent who wanted to encourage his spiritual son by having the opportunity to visit him and share Biblical principles with him to help him in his ministry for the Lord.

John wanted Gaius to experience the peace that comes from the Lord. Philippians 4:7 says, “And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.” We want to have the same concern for our physical and spiritual children that John had for his spiritual children. John also wanted to send greetings to Gaius from the Christians with John. At the same time, John wanted to send his greetings to the other Christians in the church. Again, John gives us an example for our own lives and how to build relationships with other Christians. May the Lord richly bless you as you help your children learn to understand the dangers of pride.