



“The Poison of Preeminence”

3 John 9-10

Theme: Tolerating self-willed leaders causes injury to the church and the testimony of Christ.

Introduction: One of the great problems that plague people is the tendency to think more highly of ourselves than we ought to think. Our self-inflated importance causes us to sometimes seek to be preeminent – desiring to assert our own will, ways, and words above anyone ... at times even above God and His Word. When one’s pride has so infected them, their impact to the church is injurious.

I. Dismisses God’s Word – *1:9*

A. INFATUATED WITH ONE’S OWN SIGNIFICANCE

1. John calls our attention to the example of a man who serves as a negative example of a man who refuses to be vulnerable, transparent, and open in the church.
2. He recalls how, as an Apostle, he had provided instruction to the church – *“I wrote something to the church; but Diotrephes ... does not accept what we say.”*
3. The reason that *“Diotrephes”* behaved the way he did was because he is *one “who loves to be first among them...”* – that is among the people in the church.
4. *“loves to be first”* [φιλοπρωτεύω] – is a compound word that literally means to have a “special interest” in being in the leading position – used only here in the New Testament.
5. It describes a person who is selfish, self-willed, self-centered, and self-seeking in promoting oneself.
6. His pride had brought him to a place where he was the

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authority on any and all subjects spiritual and believed that he ought to be in control.

B. IMMOVABLE FROM ONE’S OWN SUPPOSITIONS

- 1.As a result, we are told that he “... *does not accept what we say.*”
- 2.His own opinions on a matter outweighed the counsel of godly leaders – even an Apostle of Jesus Christ.
- 3.The influence and authority of an Apostle of Jesus Christ was the very authority of Christ Himself.
- 4.His arrogance caused him to refuse to accept that someone other than himself was the one through whom God would provide direction – cp. Korah – *Number 16:3*
- 5.No one – not even an Apostle – could give Diotrephes direction; and thus, there was little genuine concern for the will from the Lord.
- 6.His arrogance caused him to be concerned with only one opinion, his own.

II. Disparages God’s Leaders – *1:10a*

A. THE ACCOUNTABILITY TO GOD’S LEADERS

- 1.The Word of God is something that is not of “private interpretation” – cp. *2 Peter 1:21*
- 2.Thus, such a self-willed person senses the threat that other spiritual leaders are to their “reign.”
- 3.John highlights that Diotrephes was accountable and would be confronted properly when John came to visit – “*For this reason, if I come, I will call attention to his deeds which he does ...*”

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4. This demonstrates that Diotrephes' leadership approach was not a mistake, but was a constant characteristic.
5. John said that his excess in leadership would have to be called out – and that it would take someone like John to do it effectively because of Diotrephes' punitive *modus operandi*.

B. THE ACCUSATION OF GOD'S LEADERS

1. Diotrephes' constantly sought to insulate himself from the influence of other Godly leaders by going on the offensive and slandering them.
2. John states: *"... unjustly accusing us with wicked words ..."*
3. Diotrephes sought to heighten his own trustworthiness in the eyes of the people by destroying trust in other leaders.
4. *"unjustly accusing"* [φλυαρῆω] – refers literally to indulging in saying things that fail to align with reality; indulging in utterance that makes no sense – given the truth.
5. *"wicked words"* [πονηρός] refers to what is malignant – that is, the accusations spread like wildfire to do maximum damage through gossip.
6. He savagely attacked John and the other leaders as defective leaders and made up stories to corroborate his accusations.

III. Disables God's Correction – 1:10b

A. THE ALOOFNESS FROM CAMARADERIE

1. He didn't stop with such evil accusations, *"... and not satisfied with this, he himself does not receive the brethren ..."*
2. Here we see that he disables contradictory voices – refusing

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to “receive the brethren.”

3. Whereas Gaius is lauded by John and ministering to these brethren, Diotrephes is faulted for refusing to participate with these torch-bearers of truth.

4. He saw such itinerant preachers as threats to his power in the church, Diotrephes wouldn't give them a platform for their preaching and teaching.

B. THE AVOIDING OF CORRECTION

1. In this way, Diotrephes avoided being corrected by men who came through and taught accurately the word of God.

2. By keeping other preachers from being able to “weigh in” on a subject, he maintains a lone voice to truth.

3. He preserves his monopoly on instructing the congregation and thus couldn't be contradicted.

IV. Demands Conformity – *1:10c*

A. THE OBSTRUCTION TO FELLOWSHIP

1. But, he had to go even further, he couldn't let anyone listen to other voices – “... *he forbids those who desire to do so* [receive the brethren].”

2. “*forbids*” [κωλύω] – to hinder, restrain, or withhold – a refusal to permit those who “*desire*” to receive the brethren.

B. THE OFFENSE OF FELLOWSHIP

1. Diotrephes would “*put them out of the church*” – that is, he would exercise church discipline and “excommunicate” them.

2. His threat and intimidation would keep people from listening to voices that might contradict Diotrephes' opinions.

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3. One of the reasons that John was encouraging Gaius to continue to display hospitality – cp. v. 5, 8
4. The ambition of this man Diotrephes was to grasp power, hold on to it by means of whatever was necessary, crushing opposition through intimidation, slander, defiance, and self-promotion.