

Glad Tidings

“And we bring you good tidings of the promise made unto the fathers...” (Acts 13:32)

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Avoiding Being A Diotrefes

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What is a “Diotrefes”? It is a person who is a “religious dictator.” You might call this person a “spiritual bully.” In the New Testament, this person was a man who lived in the latter part of the first century. He is on the apostle John’s radar list in John’s personal letter to a faithful brother in Christ named Gaius (3 John 1:1,9-10). The inspired apostle categorizes him as a doer of evil, one who has not seen God (3 John 1:11).

Can you imagine there was one influential in the church who had not seen God, but is seeking preeminence among her members? This is a catastrophe in the making. How can we avoid being a “Diotrefes”?

We can start by not being puffed up with pride. Humbling ourselves before God, instead of exalting ourselves before men is a good place to start. It is a heart issue from the beginning: Diotrefes “loved to have the preeminence among them” in the church (3 John 1:9). We know God resists the proud, and therefore we must submit to God (James 4:6-7). Diotrefes was not willing to even listen to confirmed apostles of the Lord, much less submit to God’s teaching. He refused to “receive John, a

chosen apostle of Jesus Christ, and his co-workers (3 John 1:9).

A “Diotrefes pride” can be avoided if we hate the fruit it produces. It produces discontent. Diotrefes was not content with mere exaltation in the church, but craved power over the membership’s lives. He was not content with his personal determination to not receive John and his co-workers, but he “cast out of the church” those who did receive God’s messengers (3 John 1:10). “My way, or the highway” is where pride led Diotrefes. Can you see why he is described as a “religious dictator,” and a “spiritual bully”? Diotrefes’ discontent led to division among Christians who should be unified.

Avoiding being a Diotrefes can be a reality if we avoid being a gossip or a tattler. Behind John’s back, Diotrefes was spreading falsehood concerning John. He was “prating against us with wicked words,” John writes (3 John 1:10). Pride often leads to “berating idly, or mischievously” those with whom one disagrees. Pride sprouts up with information that no one else knows, and often finds a willing ear that longs to be the first to know. A whisperer provides “dainty morsels” that are gladly

devoured into the “innermost parts” (Proverbs 18:26). Before we become a Diotrefes may we pray, “Set a watch, Oh Lord, before my mouth; keep the door of my lips” (Psalm 141:3). May we never speak lies about others, but learn also not to be a tattler, knowing there are some things “we ought not to say” (1 Timothy 5:13).

While we work on ourselves personally to avoid being a Diotrefes, what can a church be united in that avoids having a Diotrefes? First, The membership can be united in loving God more than man. Therefore, seeking the glory of God more than the glory of man will keep a Diotrefes from having success as a spiritual bully. Members will speak up for the truth of God’s Word, not fearing an influential religious dictator casting them out of the church (cf. John 9:22). The membership, being strong in the apostles’ doctrine will not be intimidated by a Diotrefes’s teaching (cf. Acts 2:42). With patience, members will keep placing the mirror of God’s word before all, exposing a Diotrefes’ refusal to hear God’s truth to his own condemnation (Titus 3:10). A Diotrefes cannot get footing when Christians refuse to avoid controversy at any cost.