

Church Dynamics

3 John

Introduction:

1. All of us in the Lord's church face the decision of evaluating ourselves before the Scriptures.
2. In addition we face the decision of evaluating others before that same authority.
3. While the emphasis may be on evaluating ourselves before we consider others, nevertheless, judgments must be made about others.
4. Who are we going to support and encourage? Are we going to cast our influence behind this one or that one? Who is on the side of right and who is not?
5. There are relational dynamics that are critical to us within the congregation we are associated with and relational dynamics that are just as critical with those in other congregations.
6. Although the Epistle of 3 John contains only 15 verses it addresses these critical issues and gives us insight into how to go about our evaluation of the relational dynamics in the church.
7. The Epistle can be divided into 4 sections for the sake of our study. We will address each one in the order they are presented in the text.

Discussion:

- I. The address and greeting (1-4).
 - A. The apostle John has traditionally been associated as the author of this epistle. Here he identifies himself as "the elder," probably just identifying himself as "the older."
 - B. Gaius is the recipient of the letter.
 1. This is a common name, like John or Matthew.
 2. Other Gaius' are mentioned in Scripture but there is no real evidence that identifies this one with any of the others.
 3. Evidently John is not well acquainted with Gaius. The text says, "Brethren came and testified to your truth." He has heard about Gaius from others.
 4. John says he has "joy in hearing about my children walking in the truth." Does this mean that John influenced Gaius to obey the gospel in the first place? Or is he speaking more generally of all those that he has influenced and merely including Gaius in that group and saying, "I have great joy in you too."
 - C. John says he loves Gaius. He identifies him throughout the epistle as "the beloved" (1, 2, 5, 11).
 1. In this address it is obvious that John views Gaius very favorably.
 2. Primarily evidenced by his understanding that Gaius is "walking in the truth."
 - D. In our relationships with our brothers and sisters we hear many things from other people about them.
 1. In this case John has received a report from others.
 2. He is confident in that report.
 3. Therefore he is confident in Gaius.

4. Obvious in our evaluation of others we have to be careful whom we listen to. If evil men give a report it should be considered with caution.

II. The praise of Gaius (5-8).

A. The report about Gaius is good.

1. He is acting faithfully in his service to the brethren, “especially when they are strangers.”
2. Evidently, some brethren had visited the congregation where Gaius was. Were they traveling evangelists? Perhaps. These are among those from whom John has heard about Gaius.
3. John says, “You will do well to send them on their way in a manner worthy of God.

B. That they might be traveling evangelists is suggested by their going “out for the sake of the Name.”

1. Apparently they are on a mission for the Lord much like Paul and Barnabas (cf. Acts 13).
2. They went out not accepting anything from the Gentiles. Were they going to take the message to Gentiles? And yet, not be financially supported by them?
3. John encourages their support (financial, emotional, spiritual)?
4. Joining with them in their work means that we are fellow workers with the truth. John would have Gaius do just what he is doing—supporting and encouraging those who “went out for the sake of the Name.”

C. It is important to notice the common focus on the truth, going out to teach the truth and supporting those who go out with the truth being fellow workers with the truth.

1. Association with this mission brings John, Gaius and the “reporters” together on common ground.
2. Their mission is the same mission. The assumption is that all Christians and every church should be given to this mission.

III. The denunciation of Diotrephes (9-10).

A. John has written to the congregation previously. Note that now he is writing to Gaius, an individual. Apparently this is a follow up letter.

B. Diotrephes, John says, does not accept what we say.

1. Had the previous letter been delivered to Diotrephes or had it fallen into his hands and had he concealed its message?
2. Diotrephes had a character flaw. “He loves to be first among them..” Perhaps he feels less and bolsters himself by wanting to be first. Occupying this place he is using it to control others.

C. John says when I come I will call attention to his deeds.

1. He unjustly accuses us with wicked words.
2. He does not receive the brethren (those strangers that have come to the congregation).
3. Those who want to receive them he puts out of the church. He is exercising power in an inappropriate way.

4. Diotrophes is about himself. He is not about the mission of the truth.
5. John sees this clearly. He intends to make it clear that this is the case by identifying Diotrophes' deeds.
6. Sometimes this may be more difficult for us to see. If we are not clear on the mission our perspective may not be clear. But when people focus on what they want to the neglect of the mission . . . When they use power in a way to control and dominate . . . it is evident they are not fellow workers with the truth.

IV. The praise of Demetrius (11-12).

- A. Verse 11 is an admonition. "Do not imitate what is evil."
 1. Do not imitate Diotrophes or those like him.
 2. Do not allow such influences to be the controlling factor.
 3. There is a distinction to be drawn between what is good and what is evil.
- B. Demetrius is now introduced as one who has received good testimony.
 1. From everyone.
 2. From the truth itself.
 3. "We add our testimony." John. Does this include the congregation where John is?
- C. Gaius, John, the strangers and Demetrius are on the same page. Diotrophes is not.
 1. The congregation where John is would support the fellow workers with the truth.
 2. Diotrophes is not to be supported.
- D. You can see something of the level of tension that would be created in this situation.
 1. In some congregations a Diotrophes is allowed to destroy the work of God.
 2. Because of their authoritarian perspective and domination they may go unchallenged.
 3. This is not appropriate.
 4. Maybe we are a Gaius and we need the support and encouragement of a John. Maybe we are like a Demetrius, who may have opposed Diotrophes, but did not have a Gaius to join with in opposing a Diotrophes.
 5. Allegiance to the mission is primary. Self-sacrifice is an evidence of good will. Loving to be first is not a mark of a healthy approach.
 6. Having a good testimony from others is critical! That means that others have faith in you. Good leaders create faith by their allegiance to the truth, by their good deeds and by their self-sacrificing commitment to the mission of the Lord.

Conclusion:

1. Are you a Gaius? Are you a John? Are you a Demetrius? Are you a Diotrophes?
2. As you evaluate other Christians . . . Do you see self-interest? Self-sacrifice? Focus on the mission?
3. Do you give good testimony to those who are good?? Are you through your testimony putting out of the church those you should be putting in???