
Words of Truth



Beware Of A “Diotrephes”

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Last week we discussed the need for an eldership in every local congregation of God’s people (Acts 14:23 and Titus 1:5-9). We discussed how the local church is not fully capable of doing all she needs to do without having qualified elders in place. We discussed how it is sinful to substitute any other arrangement as a replacement for a Scriptural eldership. There are many consequences that arise from not having qualified elders in place. Among those many consequences is the ease for one person to take the lead in a congregation wherein he (and even surprisingly she) becomes a sort of self-appointed elder.

In the Scriptures we read of a man named “Diotrephes”. We will get to who this man was in a little bit, but for short just know that this man wanted to “run the show” so to speak. Someone like Diotrephes can exist with or without elders in the local church (Acts 20:29-30). However, when there are true elders in place, there are at the very least two qualified men making Scriptural decisions TOGETHER. A true eldership makes it impossible for a “Diotrephes” type of individual to exist in the local church.

Before we get to our study about Diotrephes, I want to make a few things clear. What we are not talking about in this article are brethren who have many talents (I Peter 4:11; cf. Matthew 25:14-30), and they put them to use without trying to be the “chief” of the congregation. For example, a brother in Christ may be capable of leading songs, prayers, teaching, etc. **If he always wants to be “in charge”, that’s an issue.** If he is just willing to be used in any way he is needed (II Corinthians 4:5 and II Corinthians 12:15), this is not the type of brethren we’re talking about in this article.

We’re not talking about brethren who’ll allow themselves, their homes, etc. to be used by the in the Lord’s work (Acts 16:40, Romans 16:1-4, Philippians 2:19-30, and Philemon 1-2; 22). For example, there are some brethren who are willing to open their homes to other brethren. This is not someone being a “Diotrephes”. This is called being hospitable (Romans 12:13 and I Peter 4:9). There are brethren who are more than willing to “be on call” for anything. This is called a brother who’s willing to help bear the burdens of others (Galatians 6:2). This is not a “Diotrephes”. On the other hand, there are those who want to be **the only one’s** to do any of the above. Therein we have a problem. This is someone who bears the mark of a person likened to “Diotrephes”. So, who is this “Diotrephes” you may wonder. Let’s find out.

Who Was Diotrephes?

Diotrephes was a man who wanted the preeminence among saints. Someone who wants preeminence is someone who wants to be the superior person in comparison to others. Here is what

the word of God says about Diotrephes: *"I wrote unto the church: but Diotrephes, who loveth to have the preeminence among them, receiveth us not. Wherefore, if I come, I will remember his deeds which he doeth, prating against us with malicious words: and not content therewith, neither doth he himself receive the brethren, and forbiddeth them that would, and casteth them out of the church. Beloved, follow not that which is evil, but that which is good. He that doeth good is of God: but he that doeth evil hath not seen God"* (III John 9-11).

From what we just read, Diotrephes "ran" the congregation that he was a member of. He chose who would be received and rejected of the brethren. We know that a man or anyone else cannot determine fellowship (I John 1:3-7). He had the ability to cast brethren out of the local assembly. We all know that withdrawing from someone is a task we must all partake in (II Thessalonians 3:6). He "ran the show" with carnal tactics such a malicious [harmful] words (Romans 3:8). While it is not wrong to mark those in error (Romans 16:17-18), we know that we must never believe reports without evidence (Proverbs 18:13).

Diotrephes had too much influence and control with the brethren he worked with. Brethren, we have to be on guard lest this arrangement becomes our way here at Sunrise. No one should be given place wherein they can make decisions and influence decisions, as Diotrephes was capable of. We have to take measures to prevent this from occurring here.

Without Elders, What Must We Do To Keep From Having A "Diotrephes"?

First off, we have to be aware of anyone who wants to act superior among us (Matthew 20:20-28, Romans 12:10, and Philippians 2:3-7). Faithful brethren are more about serving one another rather than seeking dominion over each other (Galatians 5:13).

Secondly, we have to be sure that nothing is ever decided by one man, one woman, or even a small group of brethren amongst us (wherein there are no elders). From discipline to teaching the erring, all of the brethren need to be aware of what is going on when such is part of the work of the congregation (Matthew 18:15-17 and Acts 15:22). There is not one among us, by authority from the Lord, who has the right to make decisions for the congregation. In addition, nothing we do should be "done in a corner". We should have nothing to hide (John 18:20).

Lastly, when it comes to this short list of many more things that could be said, we must ALWAYS bring every consideration and decision to the Scriptures in a collective study (Acts 17:10-11; cf. Revelation 2:7; 2:11; 2:17; 2:29; 3:6; 3:13; 3:22). If we're going to speak, let it be from what God says (Galatians 1:6-12; cf. I Kings 22:14) not what we think is right (Proverbs 12:15).

Conclusion

Without a Scriptural eldership in place there are going to be brethren who feel they have better ideas than others. (They may be right too.) These brethren can easily start thinking of themselves as greater than others. While that is not Scripturally true (Galatians 6:3), it does occur. Churches divide over carpet colors because some people just have to "run the show". Let's be aware of these things!