

That You May Know That You Have Eternal Life

A Conceited Christian

3 John 9-10

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Scripture

We are closing in on the conclusion of our study in the Apostle John's letters that I am calling "That You May Know That You Have Eternal Life." John wrote three letters toward the end of the first century. He was responsible for the churches around Ephesus. He loved the believers in the churches for which he was responsible. Some false teachers were making the rounds of the churches, teaching that Jesus was not the Son of God. So, John's letters were written to encourage Christians to know that they have eternal life.

The Second and Third Letters of John were each written on a single sheet of papyrus. The common theme in each of these letters is *hospitality* shown to traveling teachers. The Second Letter of John is concerned about *withholding* hospitality from false teachers, whereas the Third Letter of John is about *extending* hospitality to true teachers.

The Third Letter of John tells us about four men and their reputations. Last time, we looked at the first part of the Third Letter of John, where we examined the reputation of the first man. Gaius showed us how a commendable Christian lives.

Today, we are going to examine the reputation of the second man, whose name is Diotrephes. We will learn how a conceited Christian lives.

Let's read about a conceited Christian in 3 John 9-10, although for the sake of context, I shall begin reading at verse 1:

¹The elder to the beloved Gaius, whom I love in truth.

²Beloved, I pray that all may go well with you and that you may be in good health, as it goes well with your soul. ³For

I rejoiced greatly when the brothers came and testified to your truth, as indeed you are walking in the truth. ⁴I have no greater joy than to hear that my children are walking in the truth.

⁵Beloved, it is a faithful thing you do in all your efforts for these brothers, strangers as they are, ⁶who testified to your love before the church. You will do well to send them on their journey in a manner worthy of God. ⁷For they have gone out for the sake of the name, accepting nothing from the Gentiles. ⁸Therefore we ought to support people like these, that we may be fellow workers for the truth.

⁹I have written something to the church, but Diotrophes, who likes to put himself first, does not acknowledge our authority. ¹⁰So if I come, I will bring up what he is doing, talking wicked nonsense against us. And not content with that, he refuses to welcome the brothers, and also stops those who want to and puts them out of the church. (3 John 9-10)

Introduction

Coach John Wooden is one of the most revered coaches in all of sports. He is best known as the basketball coach of the UCLA Bruins. He won ten NCAA national basketball champions as the UCLA coach, including a record seven in a row. He was also renowned for his short, simple inspirational messages to his players. These were often directed at how to be a success in life as well as on the basketball court. Wooden once said, “Be more concerned with your character than with your reputation, because your character is what you really are, while your reputation is merely what others think you are.”¹

This statement is so true, isn't it? I am sure we can all think of people who have a wonderful reputation. But, then

¹ See <https://www.preachingtoday.com/illustrations/1997/october/4797.html>.

one day, it all comes crashing down and we discover that the person was not at all who we thought he or she was. We learn that there was a serious character flaw that was hidden from all of us.

I have already mentioned that the Third Letter of John is about extending hospitality to true teachers. In those early days of the expansion of the Gospel, Christian teachers would travel from church to church. Because the inns in those days were not only expensive but also were houses of ill repute, itinerant teachers generally stayed in the homes of Christians.

John wrote this Third Letter to a man named Gaius. Gaius apparently frequently housed itinerant teachers in his home and John commended him for his generosity.

However, in the church of which Gaius was a member there was also a man named Diotrophes. Diotrophes was clearly a man with authority in the church, though we don't know exactly what position he held in the church. Diotrophes was apparently ambitious for even more authority. He took the opposite position from Gaius and did not want itinerant teachers to teach the word of God at the church. When John learned what Diotrophes was doing, he was distressed and wrote this letter to Gaius and the rest of the believers at the church.

I am calling Diotrophes a “conceited” Christian. *Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary* defines “conceited” as “having or showing an excessively high opinion of oneself.”² This is of course a trait that should not be found in a Christian. A Christian should think highly of others and less of himself. As I wondered about Diotrophes and his conceitedness, I wondered if we could even call him a “Christian.” Such excessive

² Inc Merriam-Webster, *Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary*. (Springfield, MA: Merriam-Webster, Inc., 2003).

conceit should never be found in any Christian anywhere. Nevertheless, I have decided to retain the title that Diotrephes is a conceited Christian. But we should bear in mind that what we learn about him is not what we as Christians want to imitate.

Lesson

Third John 9-10 shows us how a conceited Christian lives. Let's use the following outline:

1. A Conceited Christian Is Driven By Personal Ambition (9a)
2. A Conceited Christian Displays Pompous Arrogance (9b)
3. A Conceited Christian Delivers Perverse Accusations (10a)
4. A Conceited Christian Dominates with Profane Activity (10b)

I. A Conceited Christian Is Driven By Personal Ambition (9a)

First, a conceited Christian is driven by personal ambition.

As John turns his attention from Gaius to Diotrephes, he writes in verse 9a, **“I have written something to the church, but Diotrephes, who likes to put himself first....”** We don't know much about Diotrephes. He apparently claimed some mantle of leadership. Unlike the welcoming attitude of Gaius, Diotrephes would not allow itinerant preachers to be welcomed at the church. Instead of advancing the work of the gospel, Diotrephes hindered the work of the gospel. Diotrephes was driven by some kind of personal ambition. He

wanted to be the leader. He wanted to have all authority to himself. He wanted to have control.

There are times when sound, Bible-believing, Gospel-proclaiming churches find someone like Diotrephes in their midst. They may have some knowledge of the Bible and they may have the approval of some people. They have attained some level of leadership in the church. It may be informal leadership in that other people look to them for their views on certain matters. Or, it could be someone who is in formal leadership in the church.

I am aware of a pastor who built a very large church. It was a cutting-edge church. His church was in a city that has an extremely low percentage of believers. The church grew to many thousands. They were having an international impact. Then this pastor went on a ministry trip to London with some of his media staff to do some speaking. At one point, after he had spoken to a large crowd, he and his team got into a cab. People crowded around the cab wanting his autograph. One of the team members – who was blown away by all the attention – chuckled and said to the pastor, “Look at this crowd. They are acting like you are a big deal.” To which the pastor responded, “Well, I don’t know if you have noticed but I am kind of a big deal.”

Later, when this pastor was experiencing difficulty with staff and leadership, someone said to the pastor, “You should get help with accountability. You should have someone like John Piper help you with accountability.” To which the pastor responded, “That won’t work because my church is bigger than his church.”

Friends, personal ambition ruins people. Paul wrote to the Philippians, “Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves”

(Philippians 2:3).

Is it wrong to have ambition? No. Not if it is the right ambition. Paul wrote about his own ambition to the Romans, when he said, "...and thus I make it my ambition to preach the gospel, not where Christ has already been named, lest I build on someone else's foundation" (Romans 15:20). His ambition was to promote the gospel. His ambition was to proclaim Christ. His ambition was to glorify God.

Let me ask you: Are you driven by personal ambition? Are you driven by your own achievement? Or, are you driven by the gospel?

II. A Conceited Christian Displays Pompous Arrogance (9b)

Second, a conceited Christian displays pompous arrogance.

Notice how John finished his comment about Diotrephes in verse 9b, "I have written something to the church, but Diotrephes, who likes to put himself first, **does not acknowledge our authority.**" He was so arrogant and certain of his leadership that he did not acknowledge the authority of the Apostle John! Presumably Gaius and others came to him and told him what John had said. But Diotrephes would not listen to them. He probably thought that John's time had passed. He was old and should probably give the mantle of leadership to younger men. So, he displayed pompous arrogance and would not acknowledge John's legitimate authority.

Some of you in our church have come from a church where a pastor decided, for example, that he wants to lead the church in a particular way and so he removed from membership (with the support of his elders) all those who disagreed

with him. He did not acknowledge the authority of the Presbytery and pressed forward with his own agenda. He took the church out of the Presbytery but he did not do so in an open way. He did it through a civil procedure that was highly unusual. He did not allow for discussion and an orderly vote by members in an open congregation meeting to decide the denomination of which the church would be a member. This is so sad for the members of that church who were hurt by the actions of the pastor.

When we had difficulty at our own church some years ago, I was told that I was arrogant. I have to admit that I did not like to hear that. But I had to consider whether the accusation was true. An arrogant person is one who is “disposed to exaggerate one’s own worth or importance often by an overbearing manner.”³ Perhaps that was true of me. But it seems to me that the antidote to arrogance is to submit oneself to others. In that particular situation, it was to submit myself to the elders. It is to work alongside them and not to do things apart from them.

Let me ask you: Do you display arrogance? Do you exaggerate your own importance? Or do you submit yourself to others and seek to work with them to advance the gospel?

III. A Conceited Christian Delivers Perverse Accusations (10a)

Third, a conceited Christian delivers perverse accusations. John wrote in verse 10a, **“So if I come, I will bring up what he is doing, talking wicked nonsense against us.”**

³ Inc Merriam-Webster, *Merriam-Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary*. (Springfield, MA: Merriam-Webster, Inc., 2003).

Diotrephes was spreading a false report about John. And one can tell that John is irate because he not only says that what Diotrephes is saying is wrong, he says that it is **“wicked nonsense.”** So, it was not just overbearing authority on the part of Diotrephes. He was saying that John was saying things that he was not saying. And that was wicked.

I am the Stated Clerk for the Presbytery of Southwest Florida. As clerk, I am basically the secretary for the meetings that are held as a Presbytery. In addition, I am considered to be the parliamentarian for the Presbytery. So, I answer questions about procedure and try to make sure that we conduct our business as a Presbytery in accordance with our constitutional documents. Our Presbytery recently had to deal with a case of discipline against one of our members. Afterwards, a church member called me and asked me about one of the actions taken at the Stated Meeting of the Presbytery that had to do with the member. I told him about it. Later, I saw an email in which he had clearly misrepresented what I said. Now, in this particular instance, I don't think he was intentionally misrepresenting me. I think he simply misunderstood what I said and made an error.

However, there are times when people do speak **“wicked nonsense against us,”** to use the words of John. Perverse accusations are made, and that does not advance the gospel.

Let us be sure that we do not make perverse accusations against others.

IV. A Conceited Christian Dominates with Profane Activity (10b)

And fourth, a conceited Christian dominates with profane activity.

John wrote about Diotrephes in verse 10b, **“And not content with that, he refuses to welcome the brothers, and also stops those who want to and puts them out of the church.”** Diotrephes refused to welcome traveling preachers. Moreover, he prohibited church members from welcoming visiting preachers, even going so far as to excommunicating church members who welcomed such visiting preachers. John does not tell us why Diotrephes acted the way he did. He simply notes that Diotrephes’ action is wrong.

Sometimes a church member or officer assumes too much leadership authority and exercises it improperly. I remember a church member who was very good about inviting people to his home for meals. He would express his theological views to his guests. He was extremely knowledgeable about the Bible and theology. But he lacked pastoral sensitivity. Many of the people visiting his home were new to Reformed theology and they were overwhelmed by what he said to them. Some of them even left the church because they thought that his approach was the approach of all the leadership. On more than one occasion, an elder and I met with him to ask him to be more careful in expressing his views. I think that helping people embrace Biblical truth sometimes means giving it in doses that they can handle rather than giving the hardest parts first. In any event, church leaders must pay attention to what is being said and taught so that they can stay on top of things both theologically and pastorally. This particular member was not putting others out of the church. But the effect of his personal ministry was to cause people not to return to the church.

If you are a member of the Tampa Bay Presbyterian Church, I want to encourage you to greet every new person you see. Welcome them to our church. Invite them to the various activities of the church. Make sure that no-one feels not

wanted or unwelcomed.

Conclusion

Therefore, having analyzed 3 John 9-10, let us not be conceited in our walk as Christians.

Perhaps you remember that last year, actress Lori Loughlin was sentenced to two months in federal prison for her role in the college admissions scandal. She was released and must serve two years of supervised release during which she must perform 100 hours of community service and pay a fine of \$150,000. Her husband, and co-defendant, Mossimo Giannulli, received five months in prison, a \$250,000 fine, and 250 hours of community service.

During the hearings, US District Judge Nathaniel Gorton addressed both defendants and said to them:

Here you are an admired, successful, professional actor with a long-lasting marriage, two apparently healthy, resilient children, more money than you could possibly need, a beautiful home in sunny Southern California – a fairy tale life. Yet you stand before me a convicted felon. And for what? For the inexplicable desire to grasp even more.⁴

It seems to me that Diotrephes had the inexplicable desire to grasp even more. That should not be true of any Christian. We should not be conceited.

Our goal should be to honor Christ and lift up other people. Let that be our goal. Amen.

⁴ See <https://www.preachingtoday.com/illustrations/2020/october/inexplicable-desire-for-more.html>.

Mission Statement

The Mission Statement of the Tampa Bay Presbyterian Church
is:

*To bring people to Jesus Christ
and membership in his church family,
develop them to Christlike maturity,
equip them for their ministry in the church
and life mission in the world,
in order to magnify God's name.*

Sermons by Rev. Freddy Fritz

This sermon, and other sermons, by the Rev. Freddy Fritz can
be found at:

1. www.tampabaypresbyterian.org/sermons.
2. www.sermoncentral.com/contributors/freddy-fritz-sermons-11181.asp.
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