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Imitation Not of the Evil but of the Good

The self-exalting and domineering Diotrephes — an evil example

In 3 John 9-12 John gives two examples: the negative example of Diotrephes (v. 9) and the positive example of Demetrius (v. 12). In verse 9 John says, “I wrote something to the church, but Diotrephes, who loves to be first among them, does not receive us.” The church here is the church of which Gaius was a member.

The name Diotrephes is made up of Dios (from the name of Zeus, who was the chief of the gods in the Greek pantheon) and trepho, to nourish; hence, Zeus-nourished. This indicates that Diotrephes as a professing Christian never dropped his pagan name. This was contrary to the practice of the early believers, who took a Christian name at their baptism. According to history, Diotrephes advocated the Gnostic heresy, which blasphemes the Person of Christ.

John says that Diotrephes loved to be first among those in the church and did not receive the apostle. This means that Diotrephes did not receive him hospitably.

Diotrephes’ loving to be first was against the words of the Lord Jesus in Matt. 20:25-27 and Matt. 23:8-11, which places all His believers on the same level, that of brothers. In 2 John 1:9 the Cerinthian Gnostics took the lead to advance in doctrine beyond the teaching concerning Christ. Here in 3 John 1:9 is one who was under the influence of Gnostic heretical doctrine, loving to be the first in the church. The problem of Gnostic doctrine was one of intellectual arrogance; the problem of loving to be first was one of self-exaltation in action. These two evils are sharp weapons used by God’s enemy, Satan, to execute his evil plot against God’s economy. One damages the believers’ faith in the divine reality; the other frustrates their work in God’s move.

The principle was the same both with the Cerinthian Gnostics in their desire to be advanced in doctrine and with Diotrephes’ love to be first; they wanted to be above others. The Cerinthians wanted to be above others in advanced thought, and Diotrephes wanted to be first. Today’s modernists can be compared to the Cerinthians in their desire to have a higher, more advanced, philosophy. The modernists may think that the general belief among Christians is too low. Therefore, they desire to be above others in thought or philosophy. The desire to be above others and the desire to be first are both instances of pride and arrogance, and both were issues of heresy.

Among Christians today these two problems still exist. The first problem, the desire to be above others in thought, is related to doctrine. The second problem, the love of being first, is related to practice. In doctrine many desire to be advanced, to go beyond others. In practice, many love to be first. Such a love leads even to the desire to be a “pope.”

Sometimes this evil principle creeps into the church life. For example, in standing up to give a testimony we may want to say something advanced, something that goes beyond what others can say. Furthermore, in the church life we may also desire to be first. Even in a small service group, we may want to be the first, the head. This is in principle the evil spirit of Diotrephes.

Diotrephes was influenced by the Gnostics, and he advocated, promoted, Gnosticism. In this we see the subtlety of the enemy in trying to annul the enjoyment of the Triune God. Satan in his subtlety seeks either to distract us from the enjoyment of the Triune God, to cut us off from this enjoyment, or even to destroy it altogether. Consider the situation among believers today with respect to the enjoyment of the Triune God. Even the teaching of the Bible is utilized by the enemy to keep believers away from the proper enjoyment of the Triune God. Concerning this matter, a battle is raging, and we are fighting for the truth. We are not fighting for doctrine; we are fighting for the reality, which is the enjoyment of the Triune God.

As we go on to read 3 John 1:10, we see how domineering the evil Diotrephes was: “Therefore, if I come, I will bring to remembrance his works which he does, babbling against us with evil words; and not being satisfied with these, neither does he receive the brothers, and those intending to do so he forbids and casts them out of the church.” The Greek word translated “babbling,” *phluareo*, comes from *phluo*, to boil over, to bubble up, to overflow with words, to talk idly; hence, to babble, to talk folly or nonsense.

The babbling of Diotrephes was with “evil words.” The Greek word for “evil” here is *poneros*, which denotes something pernicious. *Poneros* differs from *kakos* which refers to an essentially worthless and wicked character; it differs as well from *sapros*, which indicates worthlessness and corruption, degeneracy from original virtue. The word *poneros* denotes something pernicious, harmfully evil, that affects and influences others to be evil and vicious.

In verse 11 John goes on to say, “Beloved, do not imitate the evil, but the good. He who does good is of God; he who does evil has not seen God.” Here the Greek word rendered “evil” is *kakos*, worthless, wicked, depraved. “Does good” comes from the Greek *agathopoieo* (of the root *agathos*, good), to be a well-doer (as a favor or a duty), practicing good; hence, to do good.

In this verse John says that he who does good is “of God.” Literally, the Greek word for “of” means out of, out from. Because we have been begotten of God, we are out from Him, possessing His life and partaking of His nature. God is the source of good. A well-doer, a doer of good, is one who has his source in God; that is, he is one who is out from God.

In verse 11 John tells us that he who does evil has not seen God. The Greek word rendered “does evil” is *kako-poieo* (of

the root kakos, worthless), to be an evildoer, practicing evil; hence, to do evil. An evildoer not only is not out of God, but has not even seen God. This means that he has not enjoyed God or experienced Him.

In verse 11 to see God actually means to enjoy God and experience Him. We cannot see God without enjoying Him, and we cannot know God without experiencing Him. Seeing and knowing God are a matter of enjoying and experiencing Him.

Recently I have been encouraged by many of the testimonies given by young saints in the meetings. These testimonies indicate that these young saints are enjoying God and experiencing Him. This also indicates that they have seen God and have known Him. Without seeing and knowing God, without enjoying and experiencing Him, they could not give such testimonies. Our testimonies indicate whether or not we are enjoying and experiencing God. As we have pointed out, our enjoyment of God is our seeing of Him, and our experience of God is our knowing of Him.

The well-reported Demetrius — a good example

In verse 12 John goes on to say, “To Demetrius testimony has been borne by all, and by the truth itself; and we also testify, and you know that our testimony is true.” Demetrius, who may have been one of the traveling brothers working for the Lord (vv. 5-8), may have been also the bearer of this Epistle to Gaius. Hence, a favorable and strong commendation of him by the writer was needed.

John says in verse 12 that to Demetrius testimony has been borne by all. The word “all” indicates many saints in different churches. John’s word indicates that Demetrius must have been a brother working among the churches, and thus was well known.

John also says that testimony has been borne to Demetrius “by the truth itself.” This is the revealed truth of God, as the reality of the essence of the Christian faith, which is the divine rule for the walk of all believers and by which the believers’ walk is determined. Thus, it gives a good testimony to him who walks in it, as it did to Demetrius.

Finally, in verse 12 John says, “We also testify, and you know that our testimony is true.” The “we” here denotes the apostle John and his associates. The Greek word for “true” is alethes (an adjective akin to aletheia), genuine, real; hence, true.

The conclusion of this Epistle

In verses 13 and 14, as the conclusion, John expresses the hope of closer fellowship (vv. 13-14a) and extends mutual greetings (v. 14b): “I had many things to write to you, but I do not want to write to you with ink and pen; but I hope to see you shortly, and we will speak mouth to mouth. Peace to you. The friends greet you. Greet the friends by name.” Here we see that the apostle expresses his desire for a deeper and richer fellowship with Gaius for fullness of joy in the enjoyment of the divine life (1 John 1:2-4).

The underlying thought in John’s Epistles

In the Epistles of John there is an underlying thought. This thought is related to the fact that at the time these Epistles were written certain heresies concerning the Person of Christ had crept in. The effect of these heretical teachings was to annul the saints’ enjoyment of the Triune God. This enjoyment has a focal point: God becoming man, and this God-man accomplishing redemption and in resurrection becoming the life-giving Spirit. (Excerpt from 3 John Life-studies, msg #2)

Burdens for Church Prayer

- 2026 Targets, # of baptized:22; # of prayer meeting attendance:35; average Lord’s Day attendance:10% increase
- Spread the kingdom of God by preaching the gospel on the WVC campus and in the community.
- Increase number of small groups
- Perfect young working saints as containers for the next generation.
- Practice PSRP, BNBP, and vital small groups.
- Blending in the Body, by participating in conferences and trainings
- Establish and strengthen the church services, including children, YP, usher, etc.
- Establish a prayer life individually and corporately
- Pursuing the truth and growth in life to live in the reality of the kingdom.

Announcements

- Life-study of 3 John MSG 1, 2
- HWMR: 2025 Fall ITERO Week 2
- 1/13(Tue) 7:45pm, Prayer meeting at meeting hall.
- 1/17, 2/21, 3/14, 10am. Lessons on small groups with br Minoru on Zoom.
- 1/31(Sat) 9:30-noon, South Bay blending conference of Chinese speaking sisters – Respeaking of 2025 WT messages, Santa Clara meeting hall.
- 2/13-15 International Chinese-speaking Blending Conference, Anaheim.

2/13 (Fri)	7:30pm	1st meeting
2/14 (Sat)	9:00am	2nd meeting
	11:00am	3rd meeting
	7:30pm	4th meeting
2/15 (LD)	9:30am	5th meeting

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