

Two Kinds of “Church” People (3 John 5-10)

1. Those who love truth and support it (v.5-8)

- The elder (John) continues his exhortation to Gaius and addresses him as “Beloved.”
- Gaius is subservient to the truth, walks in the truth, and supports the truth (v.1,2,3,4).
- “It is a faithful thing in all you do for the brothers, strangers as they were...”
 - Gaius had extended hospitality to not only brothers he knew but also brothers in Christ whom he had never met before and who were commissioned (presumably) by the elder (John).
 - First-century Greco-Roman culture viewed hospitality as a vehicle for honor (for the host). Hosts would generally only open their homes to men and women who brought political or social acclaim to the household.
 - Unlike the culture, Judeo-Christian hospitality was for those who offered no anticipated benefit (Gen. 18; 19; Rom. 12:13; 1 Tim. 3:2; Heb. 13:2; 1 Pet. 4:9).
 - Itinerant preachers and missionaries were sent by the apostle John (the elder) to various towns and cities in Ephesus. As these “brothers” (v.3, 5) were sent out, they were given a hand-written letter (or family seal) that was to be presented to the head of a home, affirming the character, dignity, and trustworthiness of the guest. After the letter was received and read, the host would welcome the guest inside, taking care of all their needs.
- Gaius was an exceptional host who went above and beyond what is typically expected. Gaius has and is encouraged to continue to “love” these brothers in Christ and send them on their way in a manner “worthy of God.”
- As these “strangers” (brothers) returned to the elders’ congregation, they publicly testified to Gaius’ love.
- The elder (John) reminds Gaius of the necessity and moral obligation to support those who labor for the sake of “the Name” (v.7). The Name (Acts 5:41; 9:16; 15:26; 21:31; Phil. 2:9) was a synonym for those who followed Jesus.
- The elder notes, “we ought” to support these (the brothers commissioned for the name’s sake). It included both hospitality and financial support. Why is the elder reminding Gaius of the importance of supporting those who labor for Jesus?

These brothers and strangers were accepting nothing from the Gentiles. Why? Two options:

- A. Their mission is clear, and no unbeliever would support a ministry that propagated a clear message of gospel exclusivity.
 - B. They should receive nothing intentionally so that these unbelievers do not become “justified” in their own eyes of their self-righteousness through “works of giving.”
- When Jesus sent out His disciples, He commanded them to go from village to village, receiving hospitality from those open to the message of the Kingdom of God (Mk. 6:7-13; Lk. 9:1-6).
 - Support for the ministry on behalf of the Name must come from those who belong to the Name because the world will not endorse, support, and agree with the Name’s message.
 - While God can and does use unbelievers to support His ministry, the primary responsibility for support comes from those within a particular Christian community. The generosity of God’s people is a testimony to the Gentiles (unbelievers) of God’s faithfulness to provide for Gospel endeavors.
 - Gaius is the epitome of the faithful that feed, clothe, and give drink to those who serve Jesus (Matt. 25:31-41). The elder (John) exhorts Gaius to continue his partnership with those who serve the Name.

2. Those who hate truth by suppressing it (v.9-10)

- The elder (John) shifts focus from Gaius to Diotrephes. Diotrephes is presented as rejecting “our” authority (v.9).
- What is the problem between Diotrephes, the elder, Gaius, and presumably the brothers and friends (v.3, 5, 10, 15)? Four options:
 - A. *A differing view of church authority and polity:*
 - The early church’s structure in the first century was one of development. While official church officers were elders and deacons (1 Tim. 3; Tit. 1), a peculiar question of the role of bishops and oversight of apostles in church polity and structure emerged.
 - Does an apostle have authority over a congregation that already has established leadership? As a surviving apostle, John would have authority over the teaching and structure of the church as one commissioned by Jesus (Matt. 28:18-20; 1 John 1:1-4).
 - Who is “our” authority?
 - B. *Differing positions of what constituted true doctrine and teaching:*
 - Diotrephes is a false teacher who has infiltrated and usurped the home church.
 - This option has no textual support, as the elder (John) makes no mention of heresy.
 - C. *An unresolved issue between the elder and Diotrephes (animosity):*
 - There are personal matters between the elder (John) and Diotrephes that the original audience would be fully aware of which are hidden from us.
 - D. *A combination of some of the above.*

What we do not know about Diotrephes: Did Diotrephes hold an official church office (elder/deacon)? Was he a congregant? Did the church meet at his home? Are Gaius and Diotrephes part of the same congregation? How does Diotrephes have the authority to excommunicate? How much support does he have from the congregation?

The elder (John) wrote something to the “church” (v.9). Is the church composed of congregants that gathered at Gaius’ home (or Diotrephes)? Or is the church the “collection of churches” under the authority of the apostle John who acted as a bishop (as a commissioned apostle)?

What we do know about Diotrephes:

- A. *He is putting himself first* (v.9): He is more concerned with the glory of his own name than bringing glory to the Name (Col. 1:18). He is prideful and self-assertive.
- B. *He does not submit to the elder’s (John’s) authority and those who support him* (v.9): At best, Diotrephes should submit to the elder (John) as a commissioned apostle.
- C. *He is speaking “wicked nonsense”:* Diotrephes is gossiping and slandering against the elder (John), Gaius, and the brothers/friends (v.3, 5, 10, 15).
- D. *He refuses to welcome the brothers* (v.10): Diotrephes does not extend support or hospitality to these brothers/strangers who labor for the Name (v.7).
- E. *He excommunicates (“puts out”) anyone in the congregation who supports John and his associates* (v.10).

For reasons unknown to us, Diotrephes has taken a stand against the elder and his companions who labor for the Name. He is exceedingly disruptive to the church’s health. In response, the elder (John) plans to “bring up” what Diotrephes is doing to the church. The elder (John) cannot overlook the divisive behavior of Diotrephes. The elder, however, can sympathize with Diotrephes, because at one point John loved to be first as well (Matt. 20:21-27; Mk. 10:37).

If the elder (John) cannot win Diotrephes to repentance, he may have to excommunicate him.