



MESSAGE

STUDY GUIDE

GROUP MATERIAL

SONGS

John's Last Letter – A Prophetic Protest

Bible Reading: 3 John 1:1, 9-15 NET

SUMMARY: John's final letter reveals a clash between church leaders: the Elder, representing the values of the Johannine community, and Diotrephes, the domineering leader of a satellite church. Diotrephes challenges the Elder's authority, maligns him, withholds hospitality from his envoys, and expels those who resist his strict control. His authoritarian style starkly contrasts with the Elder's example of servant leadership. This conflict is more than a local dispute; 3 John stands in the New Testament canon as a prophetic protest against one-man rule within the church. It condemns Diotrephes' conduct, but more significantly, it warns of the rise of monarchical bishops — a warning that history, ultimately, did not heed. Around 100 AD, Diotrephes symbolized the emergence of ruling bishops, a pitfall relevant in today's Christianity. John's letters preserve a unique vision of an egalitarian church rooted on truth & love, resisting the allure of ambition and hierarchical dominance represented by Diotrephes. Let us heed John's prophetic warning and embrace the Elder's example.

I.3 John is a Protest against Ruling Bishops

•“3 John was the first protest against the monarchical episcopacy [ruling bishop] which became the norm...of the Great Church.” –James Dunn

•“3 John is best seen as protesting against the increasing influence of early Catholicism...[which] begins within the NT itself... [But,] so too does a protest against early Catholicism most strongly...in 3 John.” –James Dunn

II. Diotrephes – the Notorious Church Leader (3 John 9-10)

?“One of the most notorious leaders of the early Christian church Diotrephes makes his appearance in 3 John.” –Barth Campbell

A. The Elder's complaints against Diotrephes (3 Jn. 9-10)

?“Complaints against Diotrephes are a disturbing foretaste... of arrogance & abuse of power which litter the late history of Christian leadership.” [James DG. Dunn, *Neither Jew nor Greek*, p. 782]

?Diotrephes is a standing warning against the danger of confusing personal ambition with zeal for...the gospel.” –I. Howard Marshall

B. The “Diotrephes Syndrome” –Relevant Today

C. How a Church becomes a Cult

III. The Elder vs Diotrephes — personal authority vs. institutional authority

?“In 3 John we see a conflict between a form of institutional authority (found in Diotrephes) and ‘personal’ authority (found in the Elder).” –Paul Treblico

- A. Diotrephes’ Institutional Authority vs the Elder’s Personal Authority
- B. Diotrephes Disregards the Elder’s personal authority
- C. The Elder’s View & Exercise of Authority

IV. Diotrephes – Prototype of Emerging Church Leadership

- A. Days of Diotrephes are not over
- B. Diotrephes — the Prototype Monarchical Bishop
- “The power wielded by Diotrephes is similar to that... assumed by monarchical bishops.” — C. Clifton Black
- C. Diotrephes depicts the ‘Ruling Church Bishop’ of the future
- ? “Diotrephes provides us with our one NT glimpse of hierarchical Christianity, with a sobering reminder of the self-seeking which ecclesiastical [church] hierarchies so easily foster.” –Zane Hodges
- D. The Ruling Bishop becomes the Norm in 2nd-Century AD.
- E. The Ruling Bishop displacing the Spirit
- From “Where the Spirit is, there is the Church” – Irenaeus of Lyon
- To: “Where the Bishop is, there is the Church” – Ignatius of Antioch

V.A Biblical Basis for the Ruling Bishop?

- A. Church Leadership based on the ‘Kingdom Keys’ (Matt. 16)
- B. The Kingdom Keys entrusted to Peter (Matt. 16:18-19 CSB)
- C. Diotrephes Appropriates the ‘Kingdom Keys’

VI. The Elder John Reacts to the Ruling Bishop

- A. John’s Writings – Reaction & Protest against the Ruling Bishop
- B. John’s Alternative Model of Church Governance
- C. Jesus’ Mother entrusted to the Beloved Disciple (John 19:25-27 CSB)
- D. Peter & John – Two Models of Church Governance
- E. Jesus entrusts the Keys to Peter, his Mother to the Beloved Disciple
- F. Two Church Models; Two “Currencies”
- G. What Became of the Johannine Community?

VII. How to Sustain a ‘Johannine Church’

- Retain a ‘shared ministry’ by pastors/teachers; avoid a ‘one-man-ministry;’ don’t seek a ‘celebrity pastor’
- Recall: Without the Spirit we are not the church. “You all have the anointing’ (1 Jn. 2:20, 27)
- Remain (abide) in the teaching ‘you’ve heard from the beginning’ (1 Jn. 2:24, etc. John’s Gospel, Letters, etc.)
- Keep Jesus’ commands: “this is his command: [1.] that we believe in the name of his Son, Jesus Christ, and [2.] love one another...” (1 Jn. 3:23)
- Practical love “If anyone has this world’s goods & sees a fellow believer in need but withholds compassion from him—how does God’s love reside in him?” (1 Jn. 3:17) Be like “generous Gaius” (3 Jn. 1:5-6)
- Participate – in a ‘Johannine church’
- Connect with other bros. & sisters – e.g. [a.] in a community group &/or [b.] a serving team
- Cultivate your relationship with the Lord (1 Jn. 1:7-10)
- Pursue the truth “...all of you know the truth.” (2:20b) “young people...you are strong, & God’s word remains in you” (1 Jn. 2:14) “the truth that remains in us & will be with us forever.” (2 Jn. 2:1)
- Live the truth you have; walk the talk “I’m very glad to find ...your children walking in truth” (2 Jn. 1:4) “I’ve no greater joy than...to hear that my children are walking in truth.” (3 Jn. 1:4)