

The Last Eyewitness, XIV

Diabolical Diotrephes (3rd John)

January 18, 2004

DIOTREPHESES' DRAMA

In John's day traveling teachers and preachers expected to be given a place to stay in people's homes where they spoke.

- Most public lodgings doubled as brothels.
- Sleeping quarters were filthy & infested.

And, to prevent abuse of the generosity of the people opening their homes, speakers would carry letters of recommendation. Last week John complemented the hospitable and gracious Gaius on his willingness to receive John's recommendations into his home.

... you are faithful in what you are doing for the brothers, even though they are strangers to you. – 3 John 5 NIV

This stands in contrast to what Diotrephes [die-AUT-rih-feeZ] did.

I wrote to the church, but Diotrephes, who loves to be first, will have nothing to do with us. – 3 John 9 NIV

- It was a very bold move to ignore an apostolic letter.

These letters usually contained greetings and encouragements and were expected to be read publicly to the church. Diotrephes had enough influence to reject these men, disregard their letter, and prevent his congregation from receiving them. So, it seems that's when they turned to Gaius for shelter.

Q: Why do you suppose Diotrephes did this? He was a Christian.

- Maybe he believed John's opinions were too old fashioned.
- Maybe he felt threatened by John's status and popularity.
- Or maybe he just resented John's influence and authority.

According to John, Diotrephes liked to be seen as the top dog. The Living Bible says, "... loves to push himself forward." This is a very difficult position to maintain with the last living apostle coming in and stealing all the limelight.

DIOTREPHES' DOMINOS

I wrote to the church, but Diotrephes, who loves to be first, will have nothing to do with us. So if I come, I will call attention to what he is doing, gossiping maliciously about us. Not satisfied with that, he refuses to welcome the brothers. He also stops those who want to do so and puts them out of the church. – 3 John 9-10 NIV

Diotrephes' absence of humility not only stands in contrast to Gaius, but also to the basic teachings of Jesus.

If anyone wants to be first, he must be the very last, and the servant of all. – Mark 9:35 NIV

So the last will be first, and the first will be last. – Matthew 20:16 NIV

Q: When you feel threatened or offended, or when you resent someone, does humility reign or do you push yourself forward?

- Diotrephes demonstrates a dangerous progression.

It starts with gossiping maliciously, which in turn sets in motion a destructive domino effect: Diotrephes' Dominos. And with that first domino:

1. We speak against the person

Malicious Gossip comes with a heavy price tag: your credibility and reputation. Gossip and trustworthiness are opposing forces.

A gossip goes around revealing secrets, but those who are trustworthy can keep a confidence. – Proverbs 11:13 NLT

- Trustworthy people build others up, gossips tear 'em down.

Q: Am I building God's Kingdom or am I a demolition expert?

I can keep a secret, it's the people I tell who seem to blab it all over the place!

God not only forbids gossip, He catalogs it with hate and murder.

Their lives became full of every kind of wickedness, sin, greed, hate, envy, murder, fighting, deception, malicious behavior, and gossip. – Romans 1:29 NLT

Let's get back to Diotrephes' Dominos. If we make allowances for malicious gossip it'll lead us to the next level of destruction:

Diotrephes gossiped maliciously; but then not satisfied with that, he refused to welcome the brothers. So, first we speak against the person, and with the next domino:

2. We act against the person

Revenge (or vengeance) is the impulse to inflict suffering or punishment on someone for the injury or insult they've caused.

A Marine in Iraq recently received a "Dear John" letter, in which his girlfriend said she had cheated on him and wanted him to return her photo. So, the young man asked the men in his barracks if he could borrow photos of their girlfriends and sisters; and he sent them to his ex-girlfriend with this note: "Dear Becky, I'm so sorry but I can't remember which one you are. So please take your photo from the pile and send the rest back.

There is a temptation to feel vindictive whenever our self-love is wounded. And we do little "jabby" things to pay people back for hurting us. But taking revenge in any form is clearly forbidden.

Never take your own revenge, beloved, but leave room for the wrath of God, for it is written, "Vengeance is Mine, I will repay," says the Lord. - Romans 12:19
NAS

- Taking my own revenge tells God that I don't trust Him

When we leave justice to God, we're declaring our faith and confidence in His ability to administer righteous judgment.

So, Diotrephes gossips maliciously, refuses to welcome the brothers, and then stops those who want to do so and puts them out of the church. We speak against the person; we act against the person; and with the final domino:

3. We incite others against the person

We cause our friends and family to think or speak poorly against the person that we're angry with. Or even worse, we force them to choose between us: "You can't be friends with both!"

This is the most destructive domino to the Kingdom of God: recruiting others to sin with us.

Woe to the world because of the things that cause people to sin! Such things must come, but woe to the man through whom they come! - Matthew 18:7 NIV

Q: How come believers who'd never think of luring someone to sin, often give so little thought about coaxing them into this one?

When we introduce malicious gossip to another believer, we force them to make an incredible choice:

- They can grieve the Holy Spirit or they can grieve us

And by so doing, we have not only declared our lack of trust in God's goodness and faithfulness and justice, but now we have gone so far as to dethrone Him as well.

- We're asking His followers to follow us instead.
- Malicious gossip is a dangerous, destructive, domino.

Q: Do you see why God catalogs it with hate and murder?

NATURAL IMITATORS

Then John gives some simple but sound advice:

Dear friend, do not imitate what is evil but what is good. Anyone who does what is good is from God. Anyone who does what is evil has not seen God. – 3 John 11
NIV

We're natural born imitators. Children mimic parents, teenagers copy their peers, and adults emulate those they esteem.

Married couples actually begin to look alike. That's because of shared mannerisms and facial expressions. Over the years the muscles and wrinkles begin to match.

If by nature we must be imitators, let's be selective in the people we choose to surround ourselves with. John gives Gaius an example of the type of person to hang with.

Demetrius is well spoken of by everyone—and even by the truth itself. We also speak well of him, and you know that our testimony is true. I have much to write you, but I do not want to do so with pen and ink. I hope to see you soon, and we will talk face to face. Peace to you. The friends here send their greetings. Greet the friends there by name. – 3 John 12-14 NIV

- Demetrius is most likely the man who delivered this letter.
- It would also serve as Demetrius' letter of recommendation.

Q: Do you make an effort to be around people like Demetrius?

Q: Or do you allow too much room for people like Diotrephes?