

The Third Epistle of John

Therefore we ought to support such men, so that we may be fellow workers with the truth. (3 John 1:8 NASB)

3 John 9-10

Someone read 3John 1:1-7

Someone read vv 8-14 (15)

I wrote something to the church; but Diotrephes, who loves to be first among them, does not accept what we say. (3 John 1:9 NASB)

It is shocking that Dio would act like this to the last surviving Apostle. Or is it? What incidents in the NT can you think of that indicate people regarded themselves more highly than they regarded Jesus and the Gospel?

1. Judas
2. The disbelief of Jesus' brothers
3. The flight of all the Apostles but John when Christ was crucified
4. The denial of Peter
5. The abuses at the church in Corinth
6. Mark's departure from Paul

So, is it really so surprising that Dio thought that he should "desire to be first," even over John?

Now we can understand why John commends Gaius for holding firm to his commitment to the truth.

Do you think Gaius knew about Dio before getting this letter from John?

It doesn't sound like it. How could that be?

1. Perhaps they were in different house churches
 - a. But notice who it says John wrote to ("the church")
 - b. John repeats this term in v10
 - i. Perhaps John is using "the church" in a more universal sense, or at least to signify a collection of house churches
2. Perhaps Gaius lived some distance from Dio, which would explain why they didn't know about each other
3. Perhaps this was a new behavior for Dio

"I wrote something to the church..."

Does this sound like 1st or 2nd John?

John doesn't really deal with this issue in his first two letters. These both deal with those who teach heresy (denial that Jesus came and died in the flesh), and there is nothing in 3John to indicate that Dio subscribed to that heresy. If he did, John would certainly have said so directly.

It most likely refers to a short letter to church. Why is it not in the Canon of the NT?

Because God did not want it there.

Dio perhaps destroyed it. He was what is called the "instrumental cause," serving God's Will as the "ultimate cause." Or, it has been lost.

Perhaps it was delivered by the brothers mentioned in vv5-7.

The word "something" also occurs in Gal 6:3. This indicates that whatever John wrote was important, brief maybe, but not inconsequential.

"But Diotrophes..." The name means "nourished by Zeus." This is the only occurrence of this name in the Bible. With that name, he was probably a Greek convert (perhaps a false one, as he was not practicing hospitality) and some commentators – due to the relative rarity of the name in secular texts – say that his arrogance arises from an aristocratic background. Little more can be said of him, beyond what we find here.

"Loves to be first..." This is a fairly literal translation of the Greek *philoproteuoō*. This comes from two Greek words: *Philos* + *Protos* – Literally "First-Lover"

This compound word occurs only here in the NT, signifies an ambitious, self-seeking, power-hungry person who aggressively seeks to be at the head of things and to rule over others.

He may have been an elder or deacon, but he clearly desired to rule over the whole church.

In the Greek, his character precedes his name: "The one loving to be first among them, Diotrophes." Unfortunately, this character flaw is often repeated today.

The Greek Grammarian AT Robertson writes: "Some forty years ago I wrote an article on Diotrophes for a denominational paper. The editor told me that twenty-five deacons stopped the paper to show their resentment against being personally attacked in the paper."

Who should receive preeminence in our hearts

Col 1:18

Nor was Dio deterred by Christ's condemnation of a self-seeking spirit:

Matt 20:26-28; Luk 22:24-27

The commentator John Stott writes: “The motives governing the conduct of Diotrephes were neither theological, nor social, nor ecclesiastical, but moral. The root of the problem was sin.”

Dio’s reaction is simply stated, literally “receives us not.”

The following is how some modern versions paraphrase this:

“Does not accept what we say” (NASB); “will have nothing to do with us” (NIV); “does not acknowledge our authority” (ESV)

Cf., Matt 10:40

We cannot tell from what John writes what justification Dio would give for his attitude, but it probably would center on the missionaries being viewed as outsiders who were meddling in Dio’s local church. John regarded this as an arrogant lust for power which prompted Dio to challenge John’s apostolic authority.

For this reason, if I come, I will call attention to his deeds which he does, unjustly accusing us with wicked words; and not satisfied with this, he himself does not receive the brethren, either, and he forbids those who desire to do so and puts them out of the church. (3 John 1:10 NASB)

“For this reason” looks back to what John has just written. Dio’s opposition makes it necessary for John to come and deal with the situation personally.

“If I come...” this does not mean to imply there is any uncertainty about the visit, the only thing not certain is the *timing* and the *circumstances*.

Cf. Jam 4:13-15

John is trusting God for everything in his life, as Jesus taught him.

“I will call attention...” Literally, “I will bring to remembrance”

See John 14:26 for the only other occurrence in John’s writing.

The calling to remembrance can either be positive or negative, depending on the circumstances.

“The deeds he does...” These persistent deeds reveal the true motives and character of Dio. This should probably be understood as gross understatement. They were not prompted by vindictiveness, but by zeal for the purity of the Lord’s church.

The mere fact that we have 3John is an indication that John’s authority was vindicated.

“unjustly accusing us with wicked words...”

See 1John 2:13-14; 5:18-19

And who is referred to in these passages?

The word translated “evil” is exactly the same word John uses here.

This shows the utter depths of Dio’s words vs John.

In what tense is “accusing” (or “gossiping” (NIV) or “talking” (ESV)) ? What does this indicate?

In the Greek, it conveys the sense of “talking nonsense” or “babbling like a fool.” This demonstrates how deliberate nature of Dio’s opposition that he will resort to unfounded slander.

John gives 3 descriptions of Dio’s rebellious attitude:

First, “he himself does not receive the brethren...”

It was his set policy not to invite them into his home nor let them address the church. Notice, it doesn’t merely say “he does not receive them” but what?

Himself – it is emphatic in the Greek and communicates that he is HIMSELF the ringleader, taking personal leadership in this matter.

Notice, this is precisely how true believers must treat heretics in 2John 10-11.

Second, “he forbids those who desire to do so” He lashes out at those loyal churchgoers who are following John’s command to “love one another” with a Godly love (*agapē*).

Third, not satisfied with prohibiting those who desire to support the missionaries, he “puts them out of the church.” He opposed those who went “for the sake of the Name,” because he was concerned about glorifying his own.

All three verbs (receive, forbids, puts) are in the present tense, signifying what (again)?

Ongoing action.

To quote John Stott again: “Self-love vitiates (negates) all relationships. Dio slandered John, cold-shouldered the missionaries, and excommunicated the loyal believers because he loved himself and wanted to have pre-eminence. Personal vanity still lies at the root of most dissensions in every local church today.”

Dio stands as a warning of the danger in confusing personal ambition for zeal in proclaiming the Gospel.