

Power Struggle



SABBATH—SEPTEMBER 19

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON: Isaiah 14:13, 14; Mark 9:35; 1 Corinthians 12:7–31; 1 Corinthians 13; Philippians 2:3; 3 John; Revelation 14:6.

MEMORY VERSE: “Dear friend, don’t [do not] be like those who do evil. Be like those who do good. Anyone who does what is good belongs to God. Anyone who does what is evil hasn’t [has not] really seen or known God” (3 John 11, NIV).

THERE ARE DIFFERENT KINDS OF POWER STRUGGLES. Over nations, over companies, or even over religious positions and authority (power; control), the fight for control can be ugly and very physical. The great controversy (war) in heaven began with a power struggle. Satan was trying to overtake the position and authority that belonged only to Jesus, the Creator. Unfortunately, even in the church that same spirit can be shown.

Third John, the final letter in this series, deals with a power struggle in one of the early churches. On one side are the apostle¹ John, Gaius, and Demetrius. On the other side is Diotrephes, who is trying to take control. A power struggle in a local church? Does this not seem familiar to us as Christians today?

A CLOSER LOOK AT THIS WEEK'S LESSON: To whom did John write this letter? What do we know about Gaius that could be of value for ourselves? What kind of power struggle was going on in the church?

1. apostle—the disciples (followers) of Jesus who preached and taught the gospel (the good news about Jesus) after Jesus rose from the dead.

SUNDAY—SEPTEMBER 20**THE ELDER AND GAIUS
(3 John 1–4, 13–15, NASB)**

This is one of the few letters in the New Testament (along with Philemon, 1 and 2 Timothy, and Titus) that is addressed to one person, not to a church group.

John writes of himself as an elder (3 John 1). But John was an apostle, not a local church elder, so why did he do that? There are several possible reasons: (1) The title *elder* may refer to position, age, or both. In John's case, the latter may be the reason. (2) By using the title *elder*, John shows that the letter is not just a letter to a friend, but an official letter. (3) The title points to respect and the authority of its holder. (4) In 1 Peter 5:1, Peter addresses the elders and calls himself their *fellow elder* (NASB). But he is an apostle. John may be following this custom.² (5) The use of *elder* by John may point to his being humble. This is different from the attitude (feeling) of Diotrophes.

What do we learn about Gaius in 3 John 1–4?

John must have had a good relationship with Gaius. John calls Gaius *beloved* (NASB). John also tells Gaius he truly loves him. Three times John uses forms of the words “to love” in

verses 1 and 2 to describe how he relates to Gaius.

How do we understand what it means, as Christians, to love each other? How do we show that love? Read 1 Corinthians 13.

John is glad that Gaius is walking in the truth. Two times in verses 3 and 4 John says that even brothers who had met Gaius were praising his wonderful Christian attitude and lifestyle. John, on his part, wants to meet Gaius soon and talk to him in person. The greetings to and from Gaius show that there was a larger circle of believers who knew him and who supported him.

Go over 1 Corinthians 13. How well do you show the principles (rules) that Paul talks about? In what areas do you do fairly well? In what areas could and should you improve?

MONDAY—SEPTEMBER 21**GAIUS AND HIS MINISTRY (WORK)
TO THE CHURCH (3 John 5–8)**

Read 3 John 5–8 and write in your own words what John is saying. What important lesson is here for us?

In his second letter, John had discussed the issue of hospitality.³ He

² custom—something that has been done for a long time and so has become the accepted or common thing to do.

³ hospitality—welcoming guests into your home for a meal or a night.

had warned against being hospitable to traveling missionaries⁴ who were teaching false beliefs. True believers cannot support antichrists.⁵ In 3 John, the apostle comes back to the issue of hospitality. And here John points out that some traveling missionaries needed help. They were preaching the gospel⁶ for free but needed a place to stay overnight and some food. These missionaries were people dedicated to God. But the false missionaries were not.

Gaius had supported the true missionaries and had shown hospitality toward them. The missionaries were quite impressed with Gaius and had spoken well of him in church.

What we see here deals not just with hospitality or with giving someone a place to sleep for the night. But it involves the whole principle of support for the work of ministry and missions. John is thankful that Gaius had



Gaius's example of kindness to the missionaries is an example to us.

treated these people well. It shows Gaius's openness and willingness to give of himself for the work of spreading the gospel. So, Gaius should be an example to all of us. The Lord has chosen us, as believers, to spread this truth to the whole world.

Who is that angel in Revelation 14:6, and how broad and wide is his mission?⁷

As Seventh-day Adventist Christians, we must understand our duty to support the work of spreading the gospel everywhere in the world. Whatever we do, we all can have a part.

How involved are you in helping to spread the truths we have been given? What more could you do? How much of your own time, money, and pleasure would you be willing to give up for the sake of helping others hear the good news of Jesus Christ and the promise of His return?

TUESDAY—SEPTEMBER 22

DIOTREPES (3 John 9, 10)

What important Christian principle is found in Mark 9:35? More important, how can we learn to follow it ourselves?

After having pointed to Gaius and his

4. missionaries—persons sent out by a church to spread its religion in a foreign country.

5. antichrists—people who work against God and Christ.

6. gospel—the good news that Jesus saves us from our sins; the good news about salvation.

7. mission—the special duty (work) for Jesus that a church sends a person or a group out to do.

ministry, John is now ready to deal with the problem of Diotrophes, the leader of Gaius's church. This man was responsible for many problems. So, John wants to deal with him at the right time.

What was the problem with Diotrophes in 3 John 9, 10? From the little information we have, in what ways was he going completely against what it means to be a Christian? Read also Isaiah 14:13, 14; Matthew 12:37; Matthew 18:3–6; Philippians 2:3.

Whoever this Diotrophes was, he was a problem. Church members were being pushed aside or even disfellowshipped⁸ for showing simple Christian courtesy (kindness) to others. But this was not all. Probably Diotrophes was trying to establish himself as the only leader of the church group or at least as the one in control. He may have confused lust for power with desire to spread the gospel. But Diotrophes rebelled against the authority of the apostle John and others. Diotrophes even went further and lied about John.

This was a dangerous development because Diotrophes wanted to be independent from those who controlled the church. Such an attitude (feeling) could greatly change the nature of the church and the part church members would play in the church.

Might there not be a bit of “Diotrophes” in all of us? Look

at yourself. Are you greedy for power? Do you speak out against those you do not like? Most important, are you making the sad mistake of guessing that what is best for you as a person is best for the church as a whole?

WEDNESDAY—SEPTEMBER 23

BEARING WITNESS ABOUT DEMETRIUS (3 John 11)

Why would John write 3 John 11? What important point is John making in warning about a church leader who did not follow the principles of Christ?

Verse 11 builds a bridge between what John has said about Diotrophes and what he is going to say about Demetrius. Evil has a leader, and it is Diotrophes. Diotrophes clearly is named as belonging to that which is evil. On the other hand, Demetrius is a good example for Gaius to follow.



Evil has a leader in Gaius's church, and that is Diotrophes.

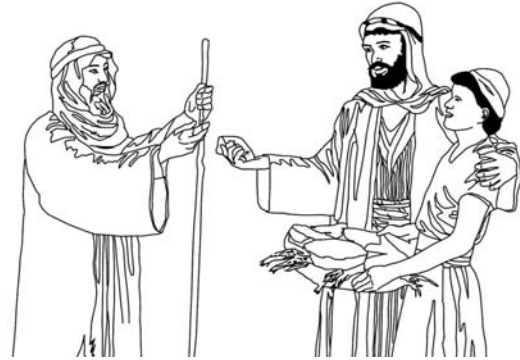
8. disfellowshipped—to remove a person's name from the church books as punishment for his or her sins.

What do we know about Demetrius, according to 3 John 12?

There is another Demetrius in Acts 19:23–29. He was the silversmith who was responsible for the riot (fight) in Ephesus when Paul preached the gospel there. Nothing in the verse shows that this is the same person.

Demetrius was a Gentile (non-Jew) Christian. Demetrius supported the apostle John and may have been one of his fellow workers and traveling missionaries. John may have wanted Demetrius to be there when John planned to meet with Diotrefes, face-to-face.

Perhaps the most important principle we can get from this one verse about Demetrius is the power of influence.⁹ Read the verse again. Who was able to speak for the faithfulness of Demetrius? It came from many directions. The point is if we are living a Christian life, if we are faithful, others will know. Others can bear witness to it. And most important, others can be influenced by¹⁰ it. So, in the end, our lives send a message, and that message can be a positive or a negative influence. This does not mean we are perfect. This does not mean we do not make mistakes. This does not mean we do not have room to improve. But it means that others are watching us. They are listening to us. And they are influenced by us. The question is, What kind of witness do we bear (give)?



Demetrius was a faithful member of God's church.

Suppose someone is giving a report about you and your Christian behavior. What would that person write, and why?

THURSDAY—SEPTEMBER 24

LEADERSHIP PROBLEM IN THE EARLY CHURCH (Mark 10:42–44)

So, from what we have read, there was a leadership problem in at least one of John's churches. John's letter shows the problem is not connected with religion. Instead, the problem is due to a power struggle and a change in how churches were governed. But often when a problem begins, it involves some issues and later moves on to others. So here, too, the doctrines (beliefs; teachings) of the church may have been involved later on.

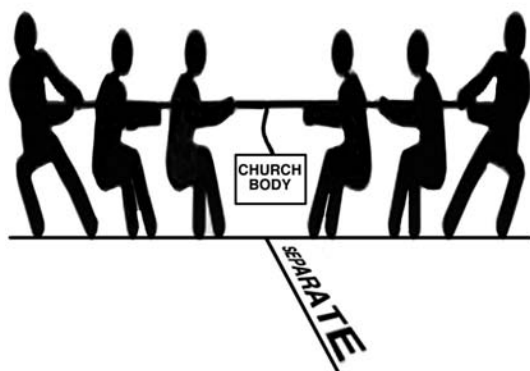
We noticed a certain kind of power struggle and some desire for independence. This is found today in the idea of congregationalism.¹¹ This happens

9. influence—the power to affect or change persons or things.

10. influenced by—to be affected or changed by the power of another person or thing.

11. congregationalism—the process in which a church group tries to become independent of the main church.

when local churches try to be completely independent from any governing church body and go out on their own. This is not the New Testament model (example).



There was a power struggle going on in one of John's churches between those who wished to be separate from other churches and those who did not.

Instead, all believers are the people and body of Christ. All believers are also part of the royal priesthood (1 Peter 2:9). All have received spiritual gifts, which are necessary for the church (1 Corinthians 12:7–31). A separation between common members and ministers (preachers) is not very common in the New Testament. But, God has called some persons to leadership positions in the church and has given them spiritual gifts. These persons should be respected. Leaders are not perfect and should not pretend to be. In some cases there even may be good reasons for complaints (1 Timothy 5:19). If the leader needs to be scolded, it should be done carefully and lovingly.

Leaders must lead. But they also

need to be shepherds. And most of all, they need to be examples for the rest of the body of Christ. Both the Old and New Testaments have lists of qualifications¹² for leaders. The words *bishops* and *elders* still are used equally in the New Testament (Acts 20:17, 28, ASV). But this changed in church history when the church established a system of authority and leadership for its ministers.

What can we learn from Mark 10:42–44; Acts 6:1–7; Acts 15:6, 22–25; 1 Timothy 4:14; and James 5:14 about how the church is to be governed?

The New Testament does not encourage lack of order and leadership in the church. Leadership is mentioned for both the local level and the universal (worldwide) church. But Jesus Himself taught that leadership in the church/churches must be servant leadership. Local churches were governed by a group of elders rather than by one person only. Decisions (choices) were made by church groups or representatives (members) of the church.

FRIDAY—SEPTEMBER 25

ADDITIONAL STUDY: Read the following verses on church government/ leadership: John 13:1–12; Ephesians 4:11–16; 1 Thessalonians 5:12, 13; 1 Timothy 1:3, 4; 1 Timothy 4:13; 1 Timothy 5:22; Titus 1–3; 1 Peter 5:1–4.

12. qualifications—abilities, skills, and training a leader needs to have for his or her position.

“Those who think their individual judgment is authoritative [ruling] are in serious danger. Satan has been working very hard to separate such ones from those who are channels of light. Through these channels God has planned to build up and spread His work in the earth. To neglect or hate those whom God has appointed [chosen] to be leaders in spreading the truth is to refuse the method [plan] that He has chosen for the help, encouragement, and strength of His people.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *Gospel Workers*, page 444.

“God has not set any kingly power in the Seventh-day Adventist Church to control the whole church or to control any branch of the work. He has not put the burden of leadership upon a few men. Responsibilities are divided among many able men.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *Testimonies*¹³ for the Church, volume 8, page 236.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

① Think about power and how power is used. When is power a good thing? When is it a bad thing? And how do

we know the difference?

② What Christians in your local church could be held up as good examples? What about them is good? At the same time, what dangers come up when looking toward any sinner as an example?

③ Have you ever been greatly disappointed by someone you looked upon as a good example? What lessons did you learn from this that could be of value to others? How can we learn from the good example of others but still be protected from disappointment if they fail?

④ How should a church act when it has a problem in leadership itself? How can it keep the right balance in dealing with the problem firmly while at the same time showing the grace¹⁴ and mercy of Christ?

⑤ Outside of Jesus Himself, which Bible character (person) is your favorite example, and why? In class, share your answers with one another and discuss what you can learn.

13. *Testimonies*—the writings of Ellen G. White.

14. grace—the good news that Jesus saves us from our sins; the good news about salvation.

